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EIGHT SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN THE YEAR 1786.

AT THE
LECTURE
FOUNDED BY THE LATE
REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.
CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY GEORGE CROFT, D. D.
LATE FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
VICAR OF ARNCLIFFE, MASTER OF THE GRAMMAR
SCHOOL IN BREWOOD, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL OF ELGIN.

Eorum lis nostra fides est.

HILAR.

O X F O R D:
PRINTED AT THE CLARENDON PRESS,
AND SOLD BY D. PRINCE AND J. COOKE;
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AND MR. TODD, YORK.

M DCC LXXX VI.

Imprimatur,

J O S. C H A P M A N,

Vice-Can. Oxon.

April 26, 1786.

TO THE REVEREND
THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
AND
HEADS OF COLLEGES;
THE FOLLOWING SERMONS,
PREACHED
BY THEIR APPOINTMENT,
ARE
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT AND GRATITUDE
INSCRIBED
BY THEIR MUCH OBLIGED
AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,
GEORGE CROFT.

*Extract from the last Will and Testa-
ment of the late Reverend JOHN
BAMPTON, Canon of Salisbury.*

— “ I give and bequeath my Lands
“ and Estates to the Chancellor, Masters,
“ and Scholars of the University of Oxford
“ for ever, to have and to hold all and sin-
“ gular the said Lands or Estates upon trust,
“ and to the intents and purposes herein after
“ mentioned ; that is to say, I will and ap-
“ point, that the Vice Chancellor of the
“ University of Oxford for the time being
“ shall take and receive all the rents, issues,
“ and profits thereof, and (after all taxes,
“ reparations, and necessary deductions made)
“ that he pay all the remainder to the en-
“ dowment of eight Divinity Lecture Ser-
“ mons, to be established for ever in the said
“ University, and to be performed in the
“ manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first
“ Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be
“ yearly chosen by the Heads of Colleges
“ only, and by no others, in the room ad-
“ joining to the Printing-House, between
“ the

“ the hours of ten in the morning and two
“ in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons, the year following, at
“ St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the com-
“ mencement of the last month in Lent
“ Term, and the end of the third week in
“ A& Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preach-
“ ed upon either of the following subjects
“ — to confirm and establish the Christian
“ Faith, and to confute all heretics and schis-
“ matics—upon the divine authority of the
“ Holy Scriptures — upon the authority of
“ the writings of the primitive Fathers, as
“ to the faith and practice of the primitive
“ Church — upon the Divinity of our Lord
“ and Saviour Jesus Christ — upon the Divi-
“ nity of the Holy Ghost — upon the Articles
“ of the Christian Faith, as comprehended
“ in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the
“ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be
“ always printed, within two months after
“ they are preached, and one copy shall be
“ given to the Chancellor of the University,
“ and one copy to the Head of every Col-
“ lege,

“ lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the
“ City of Oxford, and one copy to be put
“ into the Bodleian Library ; and the ex-
“ pence of printing them shall be paid out
“ of the revenue of the Lands or Estates
“ given for establishing the Divinity Lecture
“ Sermons ; and the Preacher shall not be
“ paid, nor be entitled to the revenue, before
“ they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no per-
“ son shall be qualified to preach the Di-
“ vinity Lecture Sermons, unless he hath
“ taken the Degree of Master of Arts at
“ least, in one of the two Universities of
“ Oxford or Cambridge ; and that the same
“ person shall never preach the Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons twice.”

*The clear income of Mr. Bampton's estate
amounts to about 120*l.* per ann.*

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

The Use and Abuse of Reason.

LUKE XII. 57.

Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?

SERMON II.

Objections against Inspiration considered.

PSALM CXIX. 130.

The entrance of thy words giveth light: it giveth understanding unto the simple.

SERMON III.

The Authority of the Ancient Fathers examined.

1 THES. V. 12, 13.

We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour

C O N T E N T S.

labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake.

S E R M O N IV.

On the Conduct of the first Reformers.

P S A L M LXXX. 9.

Thou preparedst room before it, thou didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

S E R M O N V.

The Charge of Intolerance in the Church of England refuted.

2 C O R. I. 24.

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.

S E R M O N VI.

Objections against the Liturgy answered.

N U M B. XVI. Part of the 11th Verse.

Thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord.

S E R M O N

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N VII.

On the Evils of Separation.

R O M. XVI. 17.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Present State of Religion, with some conjectural Remarks upon Prophecies to be fulfilled hereafter.

I JOHN III. Part of Verse 2.

It doth not yet appear what we shall be.

S E R M O N I.

LUKE XII. 57.

YEA, AND WHY EVEN OF YOURSELVES
JUDGE YE NOT WHAT IS RIGHT.

WE may consider this severe remonstrance of our Saviour as addressed to unbelievers of every age, we may consider it as an urgent call to exercise their understanding with diligence and impartiality upon all religious subjects. No blind deference to authority and established opinions is required, no fervour of imagination is to be substituted in the place of cool reflection and sound judgment. ^a *To prove all things and to hold fast to that which is good, to temper zeal with knowledge, to place the will and affections under the guidance of reason* is the uniform admonition of our divine Master and his Apostles.

^a 1 Thes. v. 21.

How severe was the reproof which he administered to the Jews? ^b *Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, ye discover in the common incidents and events of things sufficient penetration and discernment, how is it that ye cannot use the same degree of attention in examining the proofs of my divine mission?*

We live in an age of which credulity is not the leading imperfection. In defence of our religion no pious frauds can be practised, no specious arguments will be admitted. And while it is our duty to stand forth as those *who have not followed cunningly devised fables*, we are surrounded by so numerous an host of adversaries, that we must be cautious how we put on our spiritual armour, and lest we expose to danger the walls of our defenced city. All our vigilance will be scarce sufficient for the conflict. May He, who *teacheth man knowledge, and giveth strength for the battle*, support and assist us; may he give a blessing to the weakest and most imperfect endeavours, and may zeal and sincerity compensate for the weakness of our performances.

^b Luke xii. 56.

The general design of the discourses to be delivered to this audience is a Vindication of the Church of England against the objections of the principal Sects.—And this vindication will begin with an attempt to state the use and the abuse of our own faculties, the true notion of inspiration with the objections brought against it, and the authority of the ancient Fathers.

After which, the natural progress of disquisition will lead us to investigate the principles of the Reformation and the general conduct of the Reformers.

An enquiry will next be made into the reasonableness of separation from a discussion of the specifick doctrines which are the subject of controversy between us and our dissenting brethren.—The whole will be concluded with some observations upon the present state of religion, and some conjectural remarks upon prophecies which yet remain to be fulfilled.

The subject of the present discourse, in conformity to the words of the text, is the use and abuse of reason in matters of religion.—

The pride of Philosophy has too highly exalted reason, the mock humility of Enthusiasm has debased it. Moreover, while the Deist from self-sufficiency has spurned the aid and denied the necessity of Revelation, the well meaning advocate for Christianity has collected and exaggerated all the instances of ignorance and depravity to be found in the heathen world, and enquiries have been often made how much of the heathen morality was borrowed from Revelation, and it has been taken for granted that because some of the Greek philosophers travelled into Egypt, all their knowledge of the Deity and all their precepts respecting the private and social duties of man, were brought from thence. Their acquiescence in the popular religion is alledged as a proof of the grossness of their minds, and they are generally represented as not having themselves, much less inculcating in others, any ideas of those sublimer moral precepts, which, it is contended, are to be found only in the Gospel. The history of all kingdoms in a state of barbarity is uncertain, and it must be allowed that no one ever emerged from such a state by its own mere effects. But whatever knowledge the philosophers carried from the East, they certainly improved upon it—

It—They were not ignorant that purity of intention is necessary to constitute real goodness, that a desire of revenge is a mean and groveling passion, that man is not such a judge of his own happiness as to know what to request of heaven, and that he is insufficient of himself to become what he was intended to be, without supernatural assistance —Nor are we to impute to Cicero all the scepticism apparently to be found in his writings. He gives the opinions of every sect the most plausible appearance, and leaves the reader to judge for himself. The greatness of mind, which his morality displays, will delight an intelligent reader, as it will expose the mean and the profligate of every age and every country. Nor need any one be alarmed, if we should in some degree think more highly of the sages of Greece and Rome than we ought to think. Much vanity and pride, much unnecessary subtlety and refinement, much temporary compliance and pusillanimous condescension, to be found amongst them, will abundantly justify the censure of St. Paul, and set forth the superior excellence of the Gospel. Every age has abounded with Deists, and the present age has not the smallest number. The Church of Rome, by im-

posing too many articles of belief, has tempted many to disbelieve every thing: And every other Communion of Christians which has extended the boundaries of faith beyond the line fixed by Revelation, has indirectly, however unintentionally, added to the number of infidels. After the most earnest endeavours, *our good will be evil spoken of*; only let not this be the effect of our own imprudence.

It perhaps was never thoroughly known how much a vigorous understanding, joined with unwearied diligence, might effect. In controversy, it is safer to allow too much than too little. For to those, who are favoured with a Revelation, who have not shut their eyes against the light, it is not of the *greatest* moment to know precisely what they could have been or what they could have discovered in the days of ignorance and superstition—

But we may be asked, whether we intend to deny the existence of natural religion or to deprecate its excellence? St. Paul himself has authorized us to suppose, that independent of revelation, there are certain obligations, both to God and our fellow creatures, which ought, under all circumstances, to have been

been better understood and more universally practised than they were. ^c *The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* And again, ^d *When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* So little are the inspired penmen disposed to weaken the just pretensions even of deism.

It is a position, which surely can admit of little doubt, that, if Jesus Christ had not come into the world, first to instruct us and afterwards to die for us, there would have been certain duties which man ought to have practised, and that without an useless disquisition concerning the several sources of information, we can discriminate between such du-

^c Rom. i. 20, 21.

^d Ibid. ii. 14, 15.

ties and the additional obligations which Christianity imposes. When this discrimination is made, it is clearly seen what is or what ought to be understood by natural, and what by revealed religion. We are not now speaking of practice; for in practice ^c *Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.* Whatsoever we do, actuated solely by motives of common prudence and mere morality, has in it the nature of sin. But what is united in practice may be distinguished in speculation. The successful movement of a machine depends upon a proper union and a regular co-operation of all its powers: but this neither prevents nor discourages us from analysing them, and determining how much of each power is necessary to render the whole compleat. We, therefore, see, by the way, with what propriety our Theological studies are assisted by the previous perusal of a system of Ethicks, for though *our* Ethicks and our Theology may proceed from the same source, yet in contemplation they are distinguished from each other, giving and receiving mutual aid and assistance. For from whence arises the internal evidence of the Christian religion? Does it not arise from the sense of right and wrong implanted in the human breast?

^c Rom. xiv. 23.

Is not an appeal made to the monitor within, when we prove that *the commandment is holy and just and good?* The evidence of those doctrines which reason cannot comprehend, is subject to reason. Miracles were subject to the senses. The dispersion and the fate of the Jews is subject to our senses. Historical proofs are subject to reason. Nothing, in short, is unknown to us, but what it was impossible in this state of weakness to comprehend or unnecessary for our everlasting salvation to be communicated; and the more we exercise our understandings within those limits which our Creator has prescribed, the better Christians we shall be, unless our advancement in knowledge puff us up with pride. Nor indeed is it duly considered how much the cultivation of the mind may contribute to enoble our nature, and how much it ought to refine, in the true and genuine sense of refinement, our conversation and our morals. While many allowances should be made for gross, confused and imperfect apprehensions, for a want of the finer feelings of generosity and honour, the man of learning is engaged in no study, which does not place before him gratifications unknown to others employed in bodily labour, in the pursuit of gain or even of warrantable pleasure.

pleasure. And it would be strange indeed if his advancement in knowledge of every kind should not facilitate his progress in the way of Godliness. He sees the works of God and the wonders of his love both in the natural and the intellectual world; he receives every moment additional proofs, *how gracious the Lord is.* The only danger will be, lest he should seek for knowledge too wonderful and excellent and to which he cannot attain. In this state of weakness and imperfection the mental eye has limits which it cannot pass, and *hardly do we guess aright the things that are before us, but the things of God can no man know.*

The abuses of reason come naturally under our consideration—

The first and most notorious abuse is, when men arguing from the divine attributes endeavour to prove that no system of things could have been framed with greater communications of good to all the creation. Where was it learnt that the Almighty might not have given angelick excellence to every being under the sun? He, who hath promised, as the reward of our piety, to make us happy to all eternity, could, if it had pleased

pleased him, have placed us in that state at the very commencement of our existence. He, who hath made one man to differ from another in intellectual powers, almost as much as some are distinguished from the brutes, could certainly have caused that no such difference should exist. Even to inanimate matter he could have given life and all the enjoyments of life. He could have caused those blessings to flow in upon us spontaneously, which are now the reward of labour, care and foresight, which are often withheld from us, and which were enjoyed in less abundance and with more interruption by those who have gone before us. The argument drawn from variety is inconclusive and frivolous: for though variety contribute to the gratification of the human mind, and though it cause the supply of our wants to increase our enjoyment, yet we must allow that intellectual endowments are the greatest display of divine goodness and wisdom; and that as the less is included in the greater, the formation of a rock or a reptile only exhibits a part of that power which has been more extensively exerted in the formation of men and angels.

The Philosopher discovers that *thousand worlds*

worlds are around him, but knows not how those worlds are peopled—He sees in the planetary system a general provision for inhabitants; but he knows not their mental or corporeal endowments. Shall he therefore with this scanty intelligence endeavour to prove by his reason that every thing is in its highest state of perfection? And if he cannot prove it, the attempt is surely vain and presumptuous, indicating a goodness of intention, but a want of judgment, calculated to raise doubt and perplexity rather than to remove them. What may be proved to a proper purpose is, that creatures in general possess those faculties and powers, which are suitable for the sphere in which they move. But he cannot tell why one animal should be the prey of another, nor why animals of the same species should have different degrees of excellence. If he do not always remember, that the Creator will not be accountable to man for the different portions of happiness bestowed upon different creatures, if he will not be content to wait in silent humility, till we shall no longer *know in part*, or rather from a part, and a very small part, he will subject all our conceptions of an overruling Providence to some ridicule which might be averted. The truth is,

is, God hath created light and he hath created darkness in the intellectual as well as in the natural world, and will not suffer ^f *the thing formed to say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?* ^g *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.* Our own efforts and our own merits are totally out of the question. To one he giveth five talents, to another two, to another one, and though the greatest trust be calculated to constitute the greatest worldly happiness, yet when the whole is gratuitous, the receiver must be thankful, without murmuring or repining, without *charging him foolishly*, or vindicating him injudiciously.

These observations, as far as they are well founded, will be of use when we read *the origin of evil*, with the industrious Commentator's annotations, wherein perhaps every solution of every difficulty will not be found altogether satisfactory. Our idea of infinity is but a negative one. We are soon lost in the contemplation of those attributes which are exerted through all space, and far beyond the most comprehensive thought.

^f Rom. ix. 20.

^g Ibid. ix. 17.

Another abuse of reason is, when we endeavour to state on what occasions and in what degree Providence interferes to controul the affairs of this world. We are only made acquainted with a general care and superintendance, except in such instances as Revelation points out. That we ultimately owe every thing to the divine goodness, is a doctrine as indisputable as it is encouraging ; and that many events are brought about by an invisible agency, when all human power was either insufficient or exerted for a contrary purpose, is and has been allowed by every good man as well as by every conscientious Christian : but of what is invisible it is needless to attempt a solution, such a one as can be established upon no solid principles, and which may eventually encourage spiritual pride and uncharitableness. Our Saviour pointed out instances in those who were the objects of Pilate's cruelty, and in those upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. Many more may be found in the darker ages of the Church, many still occur among the ignorant and the unlearned. It is not granted us to distinguish in the mixed government of this world between punishments and chastisements. The credulity of the nation first occasioned those profane appeals to providence, which

which, though not formally prohibited by law, are become obsolete in practice.

Beyond the general hope of aid and protection we are not authorized to assimilate ourselves to the Jewish nation. Jehovah was their King, and vouchsafed to instruct, to rebuke and chastise them by his prophets.

* The historian of certain voyages perplexed himself and his readers with a disquisition upon a particular providence, to which he was led by a desire of giving satisfaction, where nothing can be found but uncertainty. Suffice it for us to know, that with prudence the most adverse events may be turned to our advantage, and that without it, the most prosperous will turn to our detriment.

Another abuse of reason is to be found in contemplating the great work of our redemption. The common method of vindicating the gospel is to argue *a priori* that as *all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*, so his mercy could not operate till his justice was satisfied; that an atonement was necessary, that a spotless atonement was necessary, that

* Hawkesowrth's Preface.

no one less than the incarnate Son of God could become such an atonement, and that his infinite perfections could alone render him an all-sufficient sacrifice. But there is nothing in our natural ideas of justice, which can lead us to the discovery of vicarious punishment. If we were allowed to reason at all upon the subject, we should be apt to conclude, that, if any punishment be required for the expiation of offences, such punishment would be inflicted upon the offenders themselves; that all men, like David, would be afflicted with some temporal calamity, lest they should be encouraged in wickedness themselves, or lest they should *give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*. If we can assign no satisfactory cause why the guilty did not suffer, much less can we explain, why our guilt should be transferred to the innocent. The dignity of the sufferer will be so far from assisting our judgment, that the farther he was removed from the infirmities of humanity, the greater and the more unjust his suffering will appear. For though, as God, he could not suffer, yet his emptying himself of his glory, his assumption of our flesh, his ready submission to every indignity that malice and perverseness could offer, must affect him in a degree infinitely beyond the common feelings of man.

As

As little can we reason concerning the *time* of his appearance. Attempts have been made, whole volumes have been written, to prove that no other time could have been so proper. This is far beyond our comprehension. We can say from analogy that almost every other blessing is or has been communicated gradually, that religion has had it's infancy in common with individuals and with kingdoms, and that He, who knows our frailty, withholds many of his benefits, that we may learn to value them the more. But how different is this from an endeavour to demonstrate that an earlier period would have been less suitable or less salutary? And indeed who shall explain to us why the poor Indian, why the deluded Pagan or Mahometan still remain in darkness? It can only be said that their ignorance of other kinds is equal to their ignorance of religion; and that their not having received it is no more an argument against it, than against a superior civil government, against true sound Philosophy, against every better accommodation of life. Are we preferred because we are better than they? God forbid that we should think so. The same admonition which was given to the Jews, will be applicable to us. They were reminded that their selection was

to no inherent merit in themselves, but to the free and undeserved mercy of God. And St. Paul, 2 Tim. c. i. v. 9. says that *God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us by Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.* The same is true of every advantage, indirectly so of such as are the consequence of our own industry. The power was God's, the use of it only our own. They who complain that their trust was not larger, should first explain why it was so large. They had no stronger claim than the meanest reptile, than the stocks and stones. *

* On this very point Arnobius (lib. 2. *adversus Gentes*) after having proved that the objection of novelty brought against the Christian religion is certainly very strong against the Pagan (and by the way only intending the whole as argumentum ad homines) concludes with these remarkable words, *Quare, homines, abstinetе quæstionibus vacuis impedire spes vestras ; nec, si aliter quam vos putatis aliquid se habet, vestris potius opinionibus credere, quam rei debetis augustæ. Vigent tempora periculis plena et exitiabiles imminent pænæ ; confugiamus ad salutarem Deum, nec rationem muneric exigamus oblati.* Cum de animarum agitur salute, ac de respectu nostri, aliquid et sine ratione faciendum est, ut Epidetum dixisse approbat Arrianus. *Dubitamus, ambigemus, nec esse quod dicitur plenum fidei suspicamur ; committamus nos Deo, nec plus apud nos valeat incredulitas nostra, quam illius nominis et potentiae magnitudo : ne dum ipsi nobis argumenta conquiri mus, quibus esse videatur falsum id, quod esse nolimus atque abnute mus verum, obrepatur dies extremus et inimicæ mortis reperiamur in faucibus.*

Revelation

Revelation has taught us that Christ is our Mediator and Intercessor. Amongst men, an advocate is engaged to state circumstances either altogether unknown, or not sufficiently considered or viewed in an unfavourable light by those who are appointed to hear and determine. How derogatory is every such idea from the Majesty of the Creator? He discerns at one view whatever may tend to palliate our offences. Yet he has been pleased to represent himself as prevailed upon by importunity and perseverance; he allowed the Priests and the Prophets to offer up supplications for the people, he hath commanded us to pray one for another. From analogy we can justly urge, that in the mixed dispensation of things we perform mutual service; the innocent protect the guilty, the righteous defend the wicked, the valiant die to secure those advantages which others must enjoy, the wise and the upright do more good to their fellow creatures than to themselves; in short, *one soweth and another reapeth*. It will be answered perhaps, that this holds good merely in respect to temporal advantages. It is true also in respect to spiritual. Our instruction in the way of Godliness is certainly not our own; the wholesome admonition

nition of a friend, when he sees us wander out of the way, is certainly adventitious and frequently fortuitous. Yet, by these means, we learn more perfectly and embrace more eagerly the terms of salvation. The arguments, therefore, against the mediation of Christ, as well as against the assistance of the Holy Ghost, will in proportion, though infinitely less, be inconclusive against the agency and instrumentality of our fellow creatures. Why any thing, which is not the effect of our own endeavours, should contribute to our happiness in another world, is matter of gratitude, not of vain curiosity, our conviction of the fact will be sufficient to establish its propriety. Amidst disappointment therefore and sorrow, amidst temptation and every kind of wickedness, we may rely upon the great Physician of our souls, who will cure all our maladies, unless we counteract his designs. We may deceive ourselves, but he continueth faithful.

It is another abuse of reason to enter into a minute enquiry concerning the nature of the rewards and punishments of another world. The general judgment is described in the most awful language of human judicatures ; *an account is to be given, the Books are to be opened, and*

and the Judge shall separate the righteous from the wicked. The righteous shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and the wicked shall be consigned to everlasting darkness and flames. All these descriptions, with others which it is not necessary to enumerate are intended, through the medium of the senses, to make an impression upon the mind ; they set forth the impartial justice of our Creator and Redeemer, they set forth exquisite happiness and exquisite misery, of which nothing we see or know can give us real conceptions. To give locality to the mansions of bliss and of misery is said to be unphilosophical. The reality of their existence is the only essential point, which a Christian is bound to believe concerning them. The pains and the pleasures of the mind, even in this vale of misery, can only be described by sensible ideas. But who ever contended that such ideas are adequate ? How then could it be expected that any language should express the bliss or the wretchedness of those, who shall rise with new faculties and powers, to enjoy the one or to suffer the other, to all eternity ?

Concerning the intermediate state between death and judgment, it is another abuse of rea-

son to make minute enquiry. All your information, (if such it can be called, where no particular account is given or seems intended to be given) is drawn from the promise made to the ^b penitent thief, and from the declaration of St. Paul, ⁱ *That to be with Christ was far better for himself.* And all the conclusion we can draw is simply this; that, after our dissolution, we shall continue to exist, and that we may hope for some portion of happiness immediately, ^j *if our conversation have been such as becometh the Gospel of Christ.* But here our curiosity is checked; here have commenced those perplexing, embarrassing questions concerning the sleep or the intermediate state of the soul, and from hence probably first sprung the doctrine of purgatory. To him, who is convinced that *there is no work nor device in the grave, whither he is going,* it is a sufficient incitement to Religion, that the desires and inclinations he cultivates in this world will follow him into the next, and *whatsoever he soweth that shall be also reap.*

Another abuse of reason has been to attempt an exposition of the Doctrine of the

^b Luke xxiii.

ⁱ Phil. i.

^j Phil. i. 27.

Trinity

Trinity, by comparisons and familiar illustrations. Perhaps we shall be reminded ^k of *the three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, the water, and the blood: as compared with the three that bear witness in heaven.*

Here this similarity is not a similarity of nature, but of certain and concurring evidence. It was the error of the primitive Fathers to imagine that they could render the doctrine intelligible by familiar instances, such as rays of light issuing from the sun, and torches lighted, without diminishing the source. In the darker ages, men proceeded to the grossest degree of ignorance by exhibiting this mystery in visible representations. Well might the Almighty have remonstrated in the language of the prophet. ^l *To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?* Every true friend of religion wishes that much less had been said, that much less reasoning had been employed, upon the subject; that it had been discussed with humility, and without refinement; much tumult and distraction would have been prevented in the early ages of the Church, much altercation would have been prevented in later

^k 1 John. v.

^l Is. xlvi. 5.

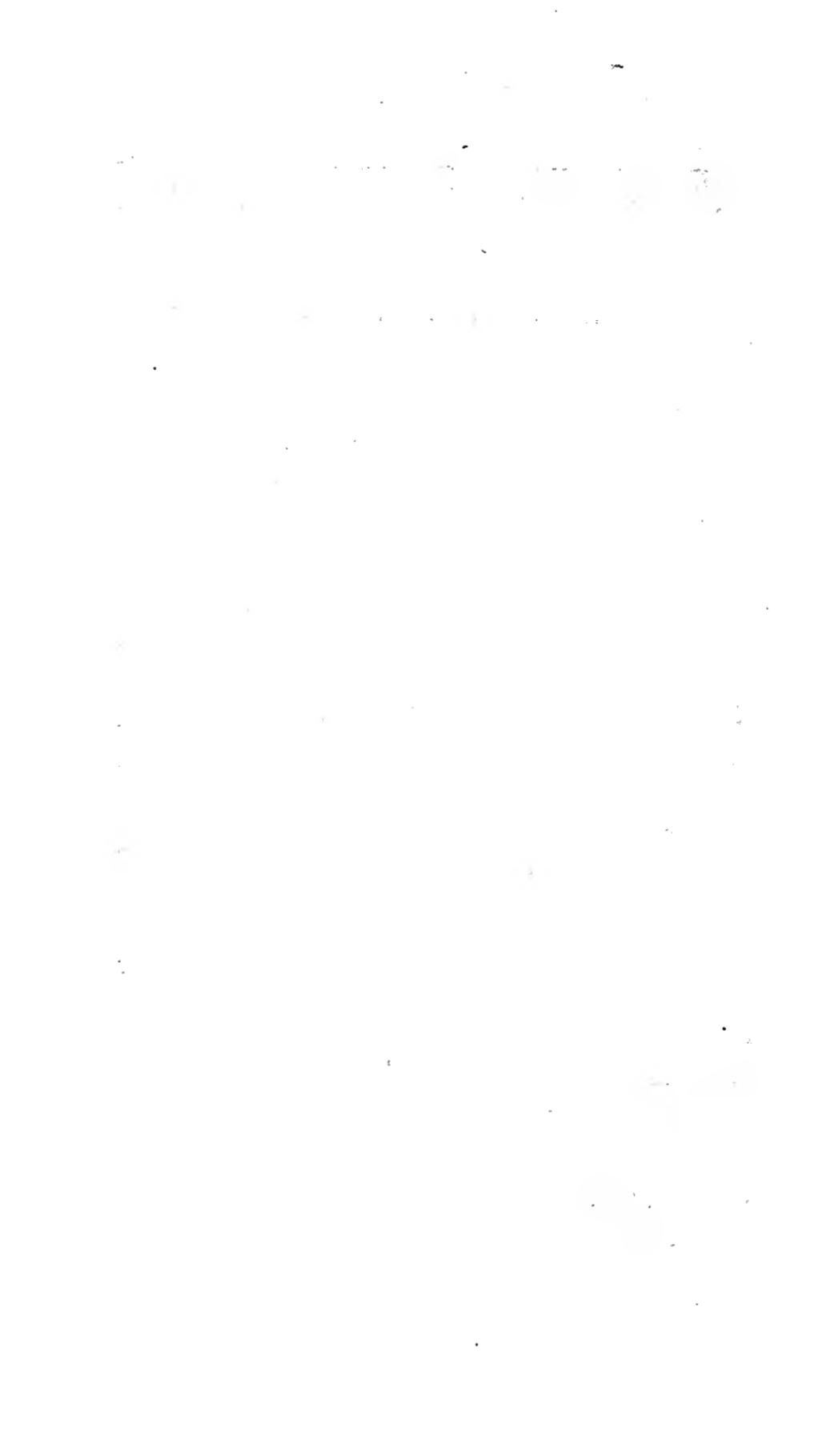
times. The attention of men would have been turned more upon the practical than the speculative parts of religion, and by less disputation they would have become more seriously and truly devout.

The last abuse of reason, which it seems necessary to point out, is in the doctrine of Predestination and Election. A future opportunity will be taken to prove, that in the Calvinistical sense of the words, neither our Saviour nor his Apostles inculcated any such thing. In the mean time, if we begin to reason, we shall never be able to explain, why the Almighty should give existence to any creature, who, He foresaw, would be miserable to all eternity, let the cause of that misery be what it may. If we proceed, every step will but the more bewilder us: we shall conclude against the eternity of future punishments, or, with the Poet, we shall find out a temporary state of suffering, or, with the Romanist, have recourse to a purgatory. Thus we shall weaken the force of those threats which present to the sinner *a worm that never dies, and a fire that shall never be quenched*. If we imagine ourselves in the number of the elect, we shall presume; if in the number of the reprobate,

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we shall despair; but the Lord is in his holy Temple, beholding the evil and the good, let all the Earth keep silence before him.

Many other abuses of reason might have been enumerated, but having adverted to such as seemed most fatal to the real interest of religion, we shall perhaps be the more fully prepared and the more properly armed for its defence; we shall in some degree have adjusted the previous conditions and the legitimate mode of contention; we shall be cautious how we engage upon untenable ground, with unlawful, inefficient, unwieldy or untractable weapons; we shall be sober minded, cool, collected, we shall sacrifice no solid good to specious advantages; and may the Lord of Hosts himself, who stilleth the raging of the *sea*, *who stilleth also the madness of the people, guide us with his counsel*, and lead us on to conquest and unspeakable glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and praise now and forevermore.



S E R M O N II.

PSALM CXIX. 130.

THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH
LIGHT: IT GIVETH UNDERSTANDING
UNTO THE SIMPLE.

IN all our religious enquiries, it is of the utmost moment previously to ascertain the nature and weight of that authority, to which we make our appeal. And as the sacred writers possess the greatest, it is natural to begin with them. The subject of inspiration has been frequently handled; it is intended in the following discourse to answer objections as they lie scattered in various authors, whether open enemies or pretended friends, to obviate or prevent misconstructions and mistakes. The variety of matter is difficult to be arranged in a particular method and in due regularity.

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On this occasion, as on many others, we shall find cause to reject the argument, *a priori*. For any thing we can prove to the contrary, the Almighty might have withheld part of the information he hath been pleased to grant, or he might have added more. Suffice it for us to acknowledge with gratitude that he hath made ample provision for all our spiritual wants and infirmities, and that his Glory is best consulted when we consult our own real interest and happiness.

Perhaps no proposition can be more indisputable, than that if the sacred writers assumed a character which did not belong to them, if they obtruded upon men their own opinions for divine truths, they must be deemed most shameless hypocrites. No plea of policy or temporary expediency could justify such a conduct. Solemn invocations and solemn appeals to Heaven, declarations of being not only instructed *what* to speak, which was frequently the act of God, but of being commanded under the severest penalties actually to speak, would amount to nothing short of blasphemy. But the sacred writers, who disdain false praise, who, with a dignity of mind unknown to other writers, record their own failings,

failings, defects and miscarriages, which they neither attempt to defend nor to palliate, are free from the very shadow of such an imputation. And as it was clear from the beginning of the world how liable even miracles themselves were to be imitated or counterfeited, Moses established the certainty of his mission by a compleat victory over the magicians.

Various have been the interpretations of the word Prophet and its corresponding terms in other languages. We are at present only concerned to examine the pretensions of those, who were, according to our belief, delegated to instruct or reprove the men of their own age, and to foretel what should happen in future periods. Dreadful were the denunciations against such as should falsely pretend to a divine commission. ** The Prophet which shall presume a word in my name, which I have commanded him not to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other Gods, even that Prophet shall die.* Then is subjoined the proper test of a Prophet. *If thou shalt say in thine heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the name*

* Deut. xviii.

of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; Thou shalt not be afraid of him. The test then of the veracity of a Prophet was to depend upon something to be performed or some event to be foretold, which should have an immediate accomplishment. For as the Almighty never afforded to men very large information concerning distant times and transactions, and as the truth of what was foretold could not be known till its accomplishment, some other proof was required to enforce belief with contemporary people.

Another passage in ^b Deuteronomy supposes a possibility of dreaming a dream, or of giving a sign or a wonder with a bad intention. The nature of the dream, of the sign or wonder is not explained, and the dreamer or worker of miracles was to be judged of by the tendency of his instructions. *If the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other Gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them. Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that Prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your*

^b Chap. xiii.

God

God proveth you, suffers this kind of temptation now and then to be placed before you, to know whether ye *love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* The reception of such persons, therefore, was to depend upon the nature of their instructions as well as upon their miracles. Even extraordinary gifts might be perverted to the dishonour of him, who bestowed them.

It is a point not sufficiently attended to, that in the early ages of the world, revelations from heaven were more frequent; and though as much of these revelations as will be necessary to confirm our faith have come down to us, yet were there many Prophets besides them whose names and whose writings are known to us. In this description we need not include the sons of the Prophets, who seem more to have resembled a body of literary persons, devoted to the study of religion and the advancement of piety.

Similar communications seem to have been vouchsafed in the early ages of the Christian Church. We shall perhaps incur the imputation of credulity, if we believe all the prophecies and all the miracles recorded by the
first

first Ecclesiastical historians. Yet the declarations of St. Paul concerning the gifts of the spirit granted to Christians, in various degrees and for various purposes, will not allow any reasonable person to doubt that such gifts were granted in great abundance for the confirmation of the truth, and in condescension to the peculiar wants and infirmities of an Infant Church. And so fully and clearly are they distinguished from the ordinary gifts and graces, after which all Christians in all ages are commanded to aspire, that every attempt to explain them away is as unsuccessful in the execution, as it is dangerous and mischievous in the intention.

Of the prophetick spirit of David many doubts seem to be entertained. The passages quoted in the New Testament from the Psalms are supposed to be adduced by mistake, or by a kind of pious fraud, or a mere compliance with popular prejudice. Let him who is conscious of a weak cause have recourse to such methods: a conscientious advocate for Christianity disdains artifice.

David's claim to the gift of prophecy is not so easily destroyed. There is something truly interesting

interesting in his whole history ; his character and his destination have been a frequent subject of discussion. It is requisite for us to enquire whether some of his psalms be not prophetic, because, as many of them as are such will internally prove inspiration. Were they what our Saviour and his Apostles have represented them, full of predictions concerning the Messiah, we are desired to explain, why no intimation is given, no exordium to be found, which might become a key to the proper interpretation. This, we are farther reminded, is so far from being the case, that nothing can be found therein which may not be applied to other circumstances and events ; and for what can be proved to the contrary, Pindar and Horace, who in the Pagan sense of the word, were inspired, may have as good and indisputable a claim to inspiration as David himself. The boldness of scriptural tropes and figures, allegories and similitudes, may be insisted upon, as they are now and then to serve particular purposes, in order to account for so much amplification.

With a learned Prelate, whose Prelections throw light on every topick which comes under his contemplation, to whom the Cri-

tick and the Divine are equally indebted, we must ever acknowledge, that there is great danger lest distance of time and disadvantage of situation should disable us from seeing clearly the sense and the beauties of the * Hebrew poetry, or lest we should judge of it by our own. Notwithstanding this difficulty, it will give every true friend of religion real satisfaction to find that the legitimate rules of criticism will justify the construction commonly put upon the numerous psalms relating to our Saviour; that if present incidents are at all alluded to, they are alluded to in expressions which have a farther meaning, and that the most distant event is most literally described. To Israel, to Sion, to Jerusalem throughout the † prophetick writings, are opposed in the allegorical as well as in the proper sense, the Assyrians, Babylon, Egypt, Idumæa. And if these observations be just, the usual interpretations of the second, the seventy-second, and other psalms, will no longer be imputed to the reveries of Mysticism, but will be easy and natural. The fastidious critick may remind us that convulsions of state are described under the idea of darkness in the Heavens, and a returning chaos; and that all the imagery far

* Bp. Lowth Præl. 5.

† Præl. 11.

exceeds

exceeds the boldness of western imagery: he may proceed to ask us, if amplification prevail on some occasions, why not on others? To which we may answer, that an obvious distinction subsists between figurative, and simple language. In the abovementioned psalms, we have no tropes nor figures: all is easy and unadorned: David and Solomon are, by our own supposition, no farther figurative characters, than as every illustrious ancestor represents an illustrious descendant, and in whom he himself, in common language, is said afterwards to exist. Nor is the propriety of such language affected by difference of rank and dignity. It is this very difference that justifies our interpretation.

With the great event of Christ's manifestation so many passages are connected; there are so many promises of establishing the throne of David from generation to generation, and for ever, that it were as superfluous, as it is endless, to recite them. David declares that in the person of Christ he shall rise again: of himself, ^c St. Peter incontestably proves, that such a declaration could not be true. *Thou*

^c Acts ii.

wilt

wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. What a forced construction would it be to apply this to any temporal distress? How does it appear that David laboured under any at that time? Throughout the whole psalm he rejoices in his prosperity: the transition from present to future blessings is easy and natural; a transi-
tion to that resurrection by which Christ hath passed through the gates of everlasting life, and hath opened them to us.

The hundred and tenth psalm is quoted by our Saviour, and so little were the Pharisees able to explain the first verse, that from that day forth *none durst ask him any more questions.* It has been insinuated that our Lord's intention was rather to perplex, than to inform. This is a mere suggestion of fancy; nor is there a single expression calculated to countenance such a construction. If we should be referred to the two passages, wherein our divine Master silenced his opposers, one relating to the mission of St. John the Baptist, the other to the payment of tribute, the argumentation in each is solid and unanswerable. If the fear of the people, or the consciousness of secret treachery, either terrified or shamed

shamed them into silence, let this be no derogation from the dignity of our blessed Lord ; let it not diminish the real importance of his instructions. The hundred and tenth psalm, unless applied to the Messiah, will be full of real difficulty. *The dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning* is well explained : * “The “dew of thy offspring will exceed in fecundity the dew of the morning.” How beautifully does the psalmist here express the great, the speedy, and yet gentle increase of the Messiah’s kingdom ? The worship of Christ seems to be foretold in the former part of the verse : ⁴ *In the day of thy power shall the people offer thee free-will offerings, with an holy worship*, or, thy people shall be liberal in the day of thy power in holy honours, borrowing the expression from the Jewish oblation. The gospel dispensation alone clearly and incontestably proved him an object of worship, and additional motives of gratitude render him in a peculiar manner, the Lord our God. David in his last moments declared his own faith and strengthened ours. ⁵ *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, he that ruleth over man must be just, ruling in the*

* *Præl.* 10.4 *V. 3.*5 *2 Sam. xxiii.*

fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he maketh it not to grow, that is, although he have not yet caused the branch to bud, although this great event, which is the sure cause of joy and thanksgiving to me, be at some distance.

That the idea of a double meaning in some passages may not be thought altogether fanciful, we should do well to recollect, that among the Latin poets, who never soared into the regions of imagination with the sublimity of eastern poetry, there are many passages which have a hidden import beyond the literal meaning. Indirect praise, and indirect censure, moral and religious instruction are frequently conveyed by such methods, more familiar perhaps to contemporaries than to succeeding ages, but having sufficient marks and indications to be understood by the intelligent and attentive. And when it is remembered, that no prophecies were intended to be delivered with

with the fullness of historical evidence, we shall perhaps be the less surprized that the real meaning requires very careful investigation.

Justin Martyr saw clearly that the seventy-second psalm could not with propriety be applied to Solomon, whose melancholy apostasy he exposes. He likewise applies the twenty-fourth, the forty-fifth, and the ninety-eighth psalms to the Messiah, without offering the least violence to any of them.

The Song of Solomon also, upon the principles of just criticism, may be supposed to describe the union between Christ and his Church. As marriage is the most sacred union among men, so the writers of the Old Testament use it figuratively concerning the Jewish Church, and St. Paul transfers it to the Christian. Hence likewise, Idolatry, to excite the greatest abhorrence, is called adultery. Solomon therefore will be ranked amongst the Prophets, and, as far as he was a Prophet, must confessedly have been inspired.

Whether, as hath been insinuated, great wisdom joined with long experience could have produced a collection of useful precepts

and maxims, equal to that which is found in the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, is a point which opinion alone cannot determine. The full proof must be derived from scripture. And yet, by the way, let them give us one instance of any one person, however celebrated for wisdom, who has communicated to mankind sentiments unmixed with error, and free from every mark of human infirmity. Nor is this meant of the darker ages only, or of the ages of heathenism, and superstition. It is meant of the most enlightened; it is applicable to many Christians. In Solomon we see no love of novelty, no love of singularity seducing him from the direct path of true wisdom and sound judgment. We see no attempt to dazzle or to astonish; no adventitious, no gaudy decorations of language. Every admonition, and every maxim finds a ready way to the heart, and will bear the test of the strictest examination; which examination, instead of pointing out defects, will present new beauties, will command increasing and solid praise.

When the inspiration of the sacred writers is once deemed partial, it is easy to elude the force of any portion, or passage, which

which a fanciful critick may deem absurd or ill founded. Thus the whole story of the Fall of Man may pass for one of those fables, with which the history of remote times generally commences. To strengthen such an opinion, it is added, that the serpent's eating dust is now known to be a vulgar error. But a very little attention will convince us, that Moses, not intending to give a natural history, hereby points out a state of the most abject humiliation. Besides the figurative meaning of the whole sentence passed upon the serpent, he was to remain, in his appearance, in his mode of subsistence, and his hostility to man, a perpetual monument of the baseness of seducing others to sin. Man, and Woman, Heaven, and Earth, were all destined to carry the melancholy but striking proofs of the fatality of the first transgression. In this first great change, man was reminded for the future, that, in proportion as he abused the powers, and the blessings, with which he should be entrusted, they would be gradually withdrawn, or diminished. The similarity of the golden age of the poets, to the time of man's innocence, only proves that the heathen fables were many of them borrowed from the records of truth.

To

To separate the substantial from the imaginary evidence of types and figures, it seems requisite to acknowledge, that Joseph is by no legitimate rule of interpretation a type of Christ. He is recorded as an example of filial and fraternal affection, of prudence, integrity, patience and forgiveness, of unjust reproach crowned with merited honour ; as an instrument in the hand of the Almighty for the preservation of a whole kingdom, even of those who had sought his life. It is easy to trace out instances of resemblance between him and our blessed Saviour : similar occasions call for the exercise of similar virtues. But no terms are used above the account of the real fact, no additional colouring is brought forward, by which we may be led from the contemplation of what is nearer, to the contemplation of something more remote. How different is the history of Sarah and Hagar ? The whole transaction was intended to pre-figure, first, the calling of the Israelites, and the exclusion of the Gentiles from the Jewish dispensation ; and afterwards, when in comparison of the Christian Church, the Jewish establishment is a state of bondage, Hagar answers to Jerusalem, and the Christians are the genuine offspring of Sarah. Thus what might

might have appeared an instance of unparalleled cruelty and injustice in the Father of the Faithful, is found to be fertile with instruction, both under the Mosaic and the Gospel Covenant. ^f After a temporary distress, Hagar is received under the protection of Providence. Her son, after marrying a wife from Egypt, the common emblem of heathenism and barbarity, becomes the father of a great nation.

The meanest capacity may find, in the history of the Israelites, a pointed analogy to the Christian dispensation. Their sojourning in Egypt, their being allowed to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, their journey through the wilderness, their tabernacle, their priesthood, their polity, their religious rites and ceremonies, have a solid foundation in the morality and doctrines of Christianity. Of the morality they were put in immediate possession, though they corrupted it, but the doctrines were only revealed in part, *'till the Sun of righteousness arose, with healing in his wings,* to remedy all the corruptions both of faith and practice. Let any impartial dispassionate en-

^f Gen. xxi.

quirer

quirer take a view of the argument collectively. Let him contemplate a people rising from small beginnings, whose ancestor *against hope believed in hope*; let him view them increasing and flourishing in defiance of opposition; let him consider them as continually trained up and prepared for that great event, which, however beneficial to the rest of mankind, was to be their peculiar glory, was to reflect lustre on that which had been obscure from the perverseness of man, and was to bring honour to those institutions, which had been looked upon by the world at large with contempt and disdain; he will soon discover, that the legislator of Israel must have been totally unequal to such a task, by the mere exertion of his own powers. Much less would such exertion have enabled him to foretel what should come to pass in distant times. Were his history a compilation of uninteresting transactions, merely calculated for amusement, we might suppose him, like other historians, left to tradition, conjecture, or imperfect records. But the Christian scheme begins with the first transgression. The resurrection of the body is exemplified by the assumption of Enoch into Heaven. The devastation of the flood, the confusion of tongues,

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the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, are melancholy memorials of human wickedness. Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, had as much human knowledge as the world then afforded, and entered upon his important charge with diffidence and reluctance. Leaving, for a moment, the aid of inspiration out of the account, we may suppose his credulity was less, in proportion as his learning was greater; and that he was in somewhat higher probability of obtaining an authentick account of the Fall of Man, than those who live above three thousand years later.

The consequences of it are as reconcileable with the justice of God, as any other hereditary calamities; calamities, which however grievous, hold out perpetual motives to temperance, to industry, to integrity; that posterity may not suffer from our misconduct; that our example may not propagate vice to remote generations. And are not all those countries, in which Christ, though once preached, has long ceased to be known, melancholy proofs, that in spiritual, as well as in temporal advantages, the folly and the obstinacy of an ancestor shall extend their fatal effects to his descendants? The minute enquiries concerning original sin, it is absurd to defend: Scripture only warrants

rants us to maintain an innate and an inherent corruption.

The writings of infidels are replete with objections against the history of the Jews. Their injustice to the Egyptians, their extirpation of the people, whose lands they were destined to possess, their various rebellions against the Almighty, are all brought forward to arraign the divine dispensations. Were their history calculated in reality to inculcate improper notions of God's justice, its authenticity would be disputable, its utility would vanish; instead of instructing it would mislead; and all succeeding conquerors might justify every degree of cruelty, under the sanction of this commission, to the Israelites. The Lord of the Universe can give what power he pleases over the lives and the property of his creatures. The spoiling of the Egyptians was a punishment inflicted by the hands and for the benefit of the people, whom they had oppressed, and by whose labour they had accumulated great riches. The extirpation of the Canaanites was the punishment of invincible wickedness, in inflicting which the conquerors were taught, not to delight in blood, not to value themselves on any imagined

imagined superiority of goodness, but to weigh well the consequences of universal depravity. If ambition, if avarice, if cruelty have perverted this part of the history to bad purposes, an account of such perversion will one day be required.

With equal absurdity, and with equal desire to disparage the authority of holy writ, particular examples, recommended to our imitation, have been the subject of cavil or invective. ^g *Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ*, says the Apostle. We are to imitate them as far as they are worthy of imitation. The man after God's own heart was punished for his complicated crime, ^h *lest the enemies of the Lord should blaspheme*; lest they should draw improper conclusions in favour of sin, or in accusation of Providence. But suppose no such punishment had been inflicted, or the historian had been silent. Could any Israelite, much more could any Christian have doubted? Is the imposture of Rebecca and Jacob less flagrant, because the simple fact is recorded? A very slight attention to the succeeding part of Jacob's history will convince us, that he himself was harrassed by fraud and chicanery

^g 1 Cor. xi. 1.

^h 2 Sam. xii.

under Laban, and that he underwent long and dreadful apprehensions from the resentment of a brother, whom he had twice supplanted. When principles of morality are clearly ascertained, it is easy to draw the moral, without the assistance of the historian. Upon many occasions, a reader does not wish that his judgment should either be doubted or anticipated.

It is a dangerous doctrine, which some of our former friends have advanced, that, though scripture in general may be inspired, yet there are some passages in which the sacred writers have been left to themselves, have given way to ignorance and infirmity, and have uttered something absurd and unchristian. The imprecations of the psalms are the first and most obvious instances. These have been proved upon the best authority to be predictions only. And if any, concurring with our translators, will not or cannot be convinced of this, let them consider, that a prophet may be authorized in his public character, to denounce or to pray for, those divine judgments, which, in a private capacity, no human being ought to wish for. The kind and forgiving temper of David, when left to the

the operation of his own mind, is sufficiently exemplified throughout his whole history.

The curses of Job amount to nothing more than emphatical and energetick complaint under misfortunes ; they, who are advocates for the reality of Job's existence, acknowledge that the book itself is dramatical, wherein the hero is represented not as a Stoick, but with all the feelings of man, still retaining his integrity, and stedfast in his hope.

Elijah prayed that God would take away his life. He considered it as a felicity to be delivered from a crooked and perverse generation ; he supposed that his power of doing good had ceased ; he wished to sink into oblivion with his fathers, as he did not think himself better than they were. Such prayers, however expressed, are conditional ; the prophet was still resigned to his will, *in whose hands are the issues of life and death.*

The conclusion of the twentieth chapter of Jeremiah has the most objectionable aspect. If we consider it as a real imprecation, or as a prediction, we cannot give a very rational ac-

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count of it; as a specimen of poetical imagery and exaggeration, it can alone be reconciled with our just notions of inspiration. The calamities mentioned are temporal, and the supposed object probably did not exist; in fact, he seems an imaginary character, brought forward to heighten the melancholy description.

Having examined some of the material objections against inspiration, let us now see what the inspired writers testify of themselves. The well known passage in 2 Tim. c. iii. v. 16. informs us, that *all scripture is given by inspiration of God.* This is plain, full, and satisfactory. No various reading is offered to elude the force of the assertion. It must be conclusive concerning books then extant. If it be said, that St. Paul did not include his own epistles, we have other proofs for the inspiration of them. The following passages will prove the point: *He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy spirit. Ye know what commandment we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word*

word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, or, as it may be rendered, with power, and with the Holy Ghost, and with full evidence, the truth of it being confirmed by every proof that truth can have.—We have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel, which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Nor do the solemn appeals made to the Almighty for the truth of what he says, at all invalidate this idea of inspiration. They are intended to make a stronger and a more lasting impression. The Almighty is said in scripture to swear by himself. Is this necessary to the performance of his promises, or to the certainty of his declarations ? It is a condescension to human infirmity, and a compliance with human customs : it is a momen-

tous admonition of his justice, faithfulness and truth. Similar to which is the design of administering oaths one to another. The witness of our thoughts, words and actions, is always present with us, and care is taken that he may not be absent from our remembrance.

There were indeed particular cases of temporary convenience or expediency, in which the apostle gives his own advice and opinion, without that plenary authority from God, which was confined to matters of greater importance. The cases themselves sufficiently explain the reason of this, and may teach Christians in general not to confound subordinate duties with such as are binding in all ages, and under all circumstances. Of the degree of conviction, with which St. Paul delivers his sentiments on these subjects, it is not necessary to decide with precision. He speaks *as one who had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*, as one who conceives that he should be extremely ungrateful to the bishop of our souls, if he did not always consult the true interest of the Church. See 1 Cor. vii. 2 Cor. viii.

But should we for a moment suppose that St. Paul and the other Apostles did not speak
by

by the immediate guidance of the Spirit, it will not therefore follow, that their opinions, as mere men, should be less conclusive than the opinions of such as call them in question. The Apostle of the Gentiles had a vigorous and comprehensive mind : he was acquainted with all the comments and all the refinements upon the law : he was conversant with the Grecian poets and with the Grecian customs ; he understood their philosophy. He was not liable to the charge of credulity, for his prejudices had turned the contrary way. Under such circumstances a sober minded critick would not hastily charge him with error and sophistry, with a misconstruction of prophecies, or an improper application of them. Much less would he suppose that an epistle, which is to be considered as the model of our argumentation with the Jews, should be so figurative as to have types without anti-types, shadows without corresponding substance, mentioning sacrifices without any solid meaning, but to beguile rooted prepossession into compliance, and reducing the Saviour of the world to the quality of a mere martyr and a mere man. But what miserable subterfuges will not some have recourse to, when a passage, quoted in the first chapter from the

hundred and second psalm, asserting the divinity of Christ, and the creation of the world by him, shall be placed in a parenthesis or be deemed a digression.

Of the prophecies and expressions quoted from the Old Testament in the New, some are adduced in direct proof, some by way of accommodation. Yet perhaps this accommodation is less frequent than is generally supposed. It is doubted by an eminent and a very diffident critick, whether the second psalm has any reference at all to David.* And it may also be doubted, whether the prophecy applied to the children in Bethlehem, and that applied to Judas in the acts, were not designed to foretel each of those horrid crimes.

The industry of the learned has proved to us that passages are quoted in substance, but not always in words,† that they are quoted from the translation of the Septuagint, and that every attempt to settle an exact agreement must be unsuccessful, for no collation of MSS will bring about what never subsisted nor was

* See Merrick on the Psalms.

† See Dr. Randolph's preface to his edition of passages quoted from the Old Testament in the New.

ever intended. Little minds will cavil at little variations, acting in literature as in common life, attending to minuter circumstances and relinquishing solid advantages. Verbal criticism, confined within due bounds, has many singular uses; but no part of human knowledge has betrayed men into greater subtleties and more unnecessary refinements.

To discuss the whole subject of inspiration, to point out the scrupulous exactness with which all the sacred books have been examined, preserved and transmitted to succeeding ages, and to state the collateral testimonies which prove them genuine, is altogether superfluous. If what hath been said may tend to vindicate the authority we attribute to them and to increase the veneration with which we consult them, some hope may yet be entertained that these oracles of truth will guide us in the way of Salvation. The errors of transcribers have not affected one article of faith. Even such as subsist will be gradually lessened by learning and ingenuity, as long as a proper medium is observed between licentious criticism and supine acquiescence. A new version given to the people would be attended with some inconveniences, and the

discretion of their pastors will clear up obscurities and solve difficulties as far as is essential to the purity of their conversation and the tranquillity of their minds. To fix the limits of their curiosity, to extricate them from the labyrinth to which enthusiasm or misguided reason may have led them, will be an useful and a pleasing employment. *Thus they will become wiser than the aged, thus they will know of the doctrines whether they be of God.*

We should all remember that the sacred writers do not deliver a system of philosophy, that the transactions they record are not always reducible to strict chronology; that the importance more than the regular order of events is regarded; that where exact method was never intended, transpositions or interpolations will be out of the question; that the language is conformable to the manners of the times and the condition of the several penmen; that they were no farther assisted than to preserve them from material mistakes; that the influence of the Holy Spirit did not supersede the use of their natural powers, and that collateral proofs of their veracity have been and may be brought from natural and moral philosophy, from history, from travels, and from every circumstance

circumstance of man. Such is the condescension shewn to the prejudices of unbelievers, such is the care taken to remove the charge of credulity from believers. Our gratitude to the Author and finisher of our faith will increase with faith itself, and every moment spent in religious meditation will convince us more and more, *That his words are sweet unto the taste, yea, sweeter than honey unto the mouth.*

S E R M O N III.

I THES. V. 12, 13.

WE BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, TO KNOW
THEM WHICH LABOUR AMONG YOU,
AND ARE OVER YOU IN THE LORD, AND
ADMONISH YOU. AND TO ESTEEM
THEM VERY HIGHLY IN LOVE FOR
THEIR WORKS' SAKE.

FROM the inspired writers our attention is naturally turned to the labours of those, who, immediately after the days of the Apostles, became preachers of the Gospel, and some of whom sealed the truth of it with their blood. * The Author of *The Antiquities of the Christian Church* has with great diligence and fidelity vindicated the Church of England in most of her doctrines, and in

* Bingham.

her

her discipline, from the practice of the primitive churches. And indeed every sober and dispassionate enquirer will deem this no small or inconsiderable proof of the excellence of our cause; notwithstanding all the melancholy instances of human depravity and perverseness; notwithstanding all the predictions of heresy and schism, and the accomplishment of such predictions, he will suspect at least that the writings of the Fathers have some vestiges of genuine orthodoxy, and that near the fountain, the stream could not be totally corrupted.

The misfortune is, while some have paid to them implicit deference, others have treated them with indecent contempt, or unmerited neglect. While some have interpreted them in favour of Popery, others (thinking that they could not be hostile to Popery without being hostile to them) have taken a malignant pleasure in exposing and exaggerating errors and defects. A third class of men, with a still more mischievous purpose, have attacked the Christian Religion under the specious pretence of refuting them. Many of our own communion are induced to believe, that they are full of notorious imperfections,

fections, that they are fanatical and mystical in almost all their interpretations of scripture, and that however unquestionable their integrity and their piety may have been, their judgement is ever to be disputed.

It is intended to offer some general observations concerning those, who flourished for the three first centuries, and part of the fourth.

And here one cannot but previously express a wish that fastidious criticks would make as many allowances for their style and manner, as they do for the style and manner of profane authors. Do not some amongst the latter affect an antiquated manner of writing? Do not others affect low conceit and quaint antithesis, full of superstition or Patavinity, tediously prolix, or affectedly concise? Is the harshness of Plutarch's language deemed any objection, when placed in the balance with the excellent instruction he conveys upon almost every subject? *Will not Wisdom ever be justified of all her children*, even though her outward garb be destitute of elegance and splendour?

But

But whoever peruses the Primitive Fathers impartially, will find them by no means destitute of eloquence or energy. Some of them imitate successfully the style and language of the Apostles ; and true zeal is known to suggest forcible ideas and forcible language even to men devoid of rhetorical ornament.

The morality and religious precepts of all ages and all countries must be considered by succeeding times as containing matter of admonition rather than of information. But are poets and philosophers undervalued for well known and reiterated exhortations to the performance of the publick, the private, and the social duties of man ? Is not every allowance made for purity of intentions ; and is not the very desire of novelty frequently relinquished for the improvement of the heart ? Ignorance continually stands in need of instruction, and wavering virtue continually calls for aid or encouragement. The well known topicks of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come, may rouze the lethargick sinner, and however well known in theory, may be new in practice. The universal depravity of mankind fully justified the

the first preachers of Christianity in using every method to reclaim a degenerate world.

We shall, moreover, be as unjust to ourselves as we should be ungrateful to the Primitive Fathers, if we did not endeavour to receive from them all the assistance they are capable of affording. Notwithstanding the distance of our days from theirs, we have many similar errors to encounter, and perhaps can add much less than is generally imagined to the armour of which they have put us in possession.

In the following review of their conduct, it may not be improper to observe,

First, their mode of contention with the Jews :

Secondly, their mode of contention with the Gentiles :

Thirdly, their mode of contention with Heretics.

And first, let us observe their mode of contention with the Jews. Here their attachment

tachment to mystery and allegory shews itself, but not so reprehensibly as some have imagined. We have had occasion elsewhere to observe, how much of the Jewish history is typical of the Christian Church. The arguments for the pre-existence of Christ, drawn from the Old Testament, are strongly insisted on. He is affirmed to have created the world; to have appeared unto Abraham, and Jacob; to have conducted the Children of Israel through the Wilderness, and from thence he is proved to have been an object of worship to them, as well as to Christians. Perhaps too much stress is laid upon the expression, ** Let US make man in our image.* The plural is frequently applied to One only, and the language of consultation is evidently used in condescension to human infirmity. With the same kind of condescension we are told in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Genefis, ver. 20, 21. that *the Lord said, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.* It were dangerous to rest an article of faith upon that, which may be

* Gen. i. 26.

only

only a mere idiom. Justin Martyr's dialogue with Trypho comprehends all the subject of controversy between Jews and Christians.

In the Epistle of Barnabas, proved to be authentick by the testimony of Clemens Alexandrinus, there are doubtless some exceptionable passages, particularly that respecting the three hundred and eighteen souls with Abraham. * The Biographer of the Fathers, though he bestow just praise upon the practical and concluding part of it, seems to represent the former part as full of improbable interpretations. That particular animals, however, should be emblematical of particular vices, and by an easy transition, of such as are tainted with those vices, is no absurd supposition. Blood was forbidden to Noah and his posterity, to enforce the duty of humanity, because beasts of prey are distinguished by their thirst after blood. The practice of characterizing human virtues, vices, and passions by various animals was very early, and very familiar. Upon this principle, armorial bearings were first invented, and some of the tribes of Israel carried upon their standard such figures as were suggested in

* Dr. Cave.

E

Jacob's

Jacob's prophetick description. A proper attention to this kind of imagery will greatly assist us in interpreting the figurative language of the old Prophets, and of the Revelations of St. John. When the efficacy of the Gospel in subduing the ferocious passions is foretold, we are informed, that ^b *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.* Clemens Alexandrinus, in his account of the Egyptian methods of instruction, has adverted in particular to the symbolick and emblematick. 'Tis true that the Pythagoreans used symbols understood by the initiated alone. Yet does it not follow from hence that this mode of institution was not in general familiar. Nor could any thing but disuse render it otherwise. It was invented in dark and ignorant ages, and well understood even before the use

^b Isa. xi. 6—9.

of letters. The Philologist, the Poet and the Philosopher have acknowledged its advantages, have improved upon it, and have made it subservient to the purposes of criticism, amusement and information. The fig tree withers away to denote the barrenness of the Gospel among the Jews ; the devils enter into the swine, and drive them headlong to destruction, in token that the Enemy of Souls will bring the carnal and the sensual to ruin. From these considerations it is apprehended that St. Barnabas's doctrine concerning forbidden meats is upon the whole very justifiable ; he supposes the creatures prohibited to be emblematical of particular vices, of which the Israelites were to entertain the utmost abhorrence, so as not even to associate with such as were guilty of them.

The Primitive Fathers have fairly and fully stated the evidence drawn from prophecy from the days of Adam to the days of Malachi. The truth of our Saviour's predictions is fully proved from Josephus. Where the general tenour of argumentation is just, particular oversights should be pardoned, and the history of the translation of the Septuagint, given by some of them, though not al-

together credible, may have taken its rise from a pious fraud in the translators. What age has not produced its popular falsehoods, which, after gaining credit for a considerable time, have at last been refuted by succeeding enquirers?

The mode of defence against the Heathens comes next under our consideration. And here one cannot but wonder that the Fathers are so often charged with a want of learning. They were conversant in history both real and fabulous; they investigated the origin of gods and goddesses; they quoted poets and philosophers; they knew whatever was plausible, and they were able to expose whatever was impious and indecent in the Pagan religion. Sometimes they ridiculed, sometimes they inveighed against the various corruptions, which could neither be denied, nor explained away, nor palliated. This severity, notwithstanding the insinuations of the celebrated Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, with whom in many instances elegance and shew seem to compensate for sophistry and deception, was justifiable from the constant abhorrence of idolatry and superstition expressed in the sacred writings. If

splendour

splendour and magnificence have so natural a tendency to deceive the most intelligent, admonition must be frequent and powerful in proportion to the danger. Athenagoras, therefore, Tertullian, Lactantius, and others, are well supported by the authority of the Prophets and Apostles. How could ^c St. Paul and St. Barnabas more forcibly express their detestation and their sorrow to the Lycaonians, who would have done sacrifice to them, than by rending their cloaths, and assuring them that they were guilty of that very folly, which it was a primary purpose of Christianity to prevent? The history of Pagan superstition constituted much of the knowledge of all the ancients; it required very laborious investigation, it entered into every part of their government, it was the origin of most of their productions in the fine arts, which created so much admiration in succeeding ages, and upon which modern ingenuity has made but little improvement.

Except a critical acquaintance with the original language of the Old Testament, and even this exception is not applicable to all, the ancient Fathers had most of the learning

^c Acts xiv..

of which the world was in possession, and they were so well acquainted with the opinions of philosophers, that they are charged with incorporating Philosophy and Christianity together, and are said to have derived the doctrine of a Trinity from the writings of Plato.

Tertullian, in his Exhortation to Patience, selects the examples of Lucretia, Mutius, and others, from Heathen Story. Clemens Alexandrinus was not only learned himself, but exhorted others to a love of learning. * “ As in Agriculture,” says he, “ and in medicine he is well taught, who is engaged in various branches of knowledge, that he may the better be enabled to manage husbandry, and to practice pharmacy; so also he is well taught, who brings forward every thing to the truth, so that selecting what is useful from geometry, musick (perhaps the term comprehends the fine arts) grammar and philosophy, he can preserve the truth from infidious attacks.”

And a little after, when he had mentioned the opinion of some men that the Greek phi-

* Strom. lib. i. c. 9.

lofophy

lo sophy came from Satan, he subjoins the following observation. “ If the Greek philosophy do not comprehend the greatness of the Faith, and moreover be weak in performing the commandments of the Lord, yet it prepares the way before hand for kingly instruction, and first forming the disposition, qualifies him, who believes a Providence, for the reception of the truth.” His well known argumentation upon the variety of opinions in the Christian Church is particularly nervous; irresistible by unbelievers of any age or any complexion, and in the conclusion of his *Στρωματαῖς* he has laid down the principles of just reasoning in a very clear and concise manner. Where such principles prevail, fanaticism cannot enter.

The Fathers are often charged with credulity. This, in the mouth of some men, is a relative term, and rather implies a want of faith in themselves than an excess of it in others. The testimony of a friend will often be too candid, but the testimony of an enemy is equally remarkable for want of candour; envy, indignation, or contempt will invent and propagate any thing to the disadvantage of others. The darker ages multiplied mira-

cles, and recorded lying wonders. But will it therefore follow that real miracles were never performed? Must every thing be false, because there is some error? An unprejudiced reader will find as much oratory and elegance, as much useful and substantial information, in the writings of the Fathers as in those of Ammianus Marcellinus.

Eusebius tells us in the fifth book of his History, that the Gentiles acknowledged the fact of Aurelius's army being furnished with water, and of the dismay and dispersion of his enemies by thunder and lightning, and the vision of the Cross, with *hoc signo vinces*, was related to the Historian by Constantine himself. If the adversaries of our Religion could disprove the *miraculous* disappointment of Julian in attempting to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem, they might weaken the credibility of Historians, but the truth of the Prophecy remains unshaken to the present hour.

Nothing more effectually prevents credulity than a free and extensive communication among men of knowledge and integrity, and that this communication subsisted in the early ages of the Christian Church, though destitute of

of many discoveries, which in our times have facilitated human intercourse, is proved by variety of evidence. * Irenæus, after having given an abstract of the Christian Faith, adds this pleasing account. “ This preaching and “ this faith are received and faithfully pre-“ served by the Church, as if she inhabited “ one house, though dispersed throughout “ the whole world; she believes these things, “ as having but one soul and one heart, and “ she preaches these things in concord, and “ teaches and delivers them, as having but “ one mouth; for the languages of the world “ are dissimilar, but the power of tradition “ (that is of Christian instruction uniformly “ and successively administered,) is the same. “ And neither do the Churches in Germany “ believe otherwise, or teach otherwise, nor in “ Spain, nor among the Celtæ, nor in the East, “ nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor such as are “ established in the middle of the world; but “ as the sun created by the Almighty is one “ and the same in all the world, so the preach-“ ing of the truth appeareth every where, and “ enlighteneth all men, who wish to come to “ the knowledge of the truth; and neither “ will he, amongst the governors of the church,

* lib. i.

“ who

“ who is very powerful in speech, say things
“ different from these, for no man is above his
“ master, nor will he, who is weak in speech,
“ invalidate the tradition. For as the faith is
“ one and the same, neither he who can say
“ much usually adds, nor does he, who can
“ say but little usually diminish.” The in-
teresting cause, in which they were engaged
prompted them to use every method of sup-
porting it; they travelled into foreign coun-
tries, they corresponded with foreign Churches.
Pantænus, the instructor of Clemens Alexan-
drinus, went to preach the Gospel in India,
and ended a long life devoted to the service
of religion in the catechetick School of Alex-
andria, where his very learned Pupil became
his successor.

That the Christians should worship One,
who, like a common malefactor, had suffered
a publick and ignominious death, was a con-
stant topick of invective or ridicule among
the Pagans: notwithstanding which, the prac-
tice was ingenuously acknowledged, and ze-
alousy vindicated, sometimes by positive de-
clarations, that he was God as well as Man,
and that as man he suffered; sometimes *a
fortiori* by adverting to the groffer customs of
the

the Pagans themselves, who having from gratitude deified the inventors of useful things, or from fear the supposed authors of evil, could, under no circumstances, with decency or propriety arraign the adoration of Christ.

It remains that we make some observations on the mode of contention with Hereticks. The various opinions, which many entertained and propagated, were so absurd in themselves, so subversive of every thing excellent, and every thing rational in religion, that no warmth of expression, no severity of censure ought to excite our wonder. “ The* principles and doctrines of the ancient Hereticks” says a learned prelate “ were infinitely more shocking and absurd than those of any modern sectaries. The reason is, that the ancient Hereticks formed their tenets on the principles of Pagan philosophy, while the modern sectaries form theirs on the books of Sacred Scripture.” It is true that in process of time some opinions were stigmatized as heretical, which did not affect the essentials of Christianity; and the dispute concerning Easter was carried on with a degree of animosity, which the most important

* Introduction to Bishop Warburton’s Julian.

contest

contest would not justify. The original Anathema was no more than an excommunication or temporary exclusion from the Church, the governors of which, like the governors of all other societies, must have a right to prescribe rules for their own internal peace and tranquillity. Indeed, one general idea prevails in the writings of the Fathers, that our Saviour and his Apostles had delegated to the ministers of the Word, but more especially to bishops, a power of determining controversies, and deciding upon matters of faith. This power did not imply infallibility. It was an absurdity reserved for modern days to imagine that every man was qualified and authorized to frame a system of belief for himself. The Apostles are zealous in their admonitions to unity, and in severe denunciations against heresy. St. Paul, particularly, in his first epistle to Timothy, mentions some, *who having put away faith and a good conscience, concerning Faith have made shipwreck. Of whom was Hymenæus and Alexander, whom he had delivered UNTO SATAN that they might learn not to blaspheme.* After all the disputes concerning the real interpretation of delivering UNTO SATAN, it seems to imply no

¹ Tim. i. 19, 20.

more

more than an exclusion from the Church, from the means of grace and from spiritual instruction, which, during its continuance, may be considered as a temporary dereliction to the power of Satan. The real purpose was not to hurry them headlong to despair, but to reduce them to a sense of their error and an abhorrence of blasphemy. Notorious offences in the Primitive Church, whether they regarded principles or practice, were punished in a similar way; a restoration to the privileges of communion was purchased by many prayers and tears. The power of the keys, which is a name of stewardship, was exercised with becoming spirit, and yet with moderation. “It is affirmed from good authority,” says an able * champion, “that absolution in “the Primitive Church was nothing else than “restoring men under the displeasure of the “Church to the Church’s peace again.” “Under these restrictions,” to use the same writer’s words in another passage, “their censures were acts of compassion as well as of “justice, and were equally to be excused from “invasion on the rights and cruelty to the “soul of the criminal.

* Rogers of the Visible Church, p. 83.

The alternate Anathemas, which, after the Council of Nice, were denounced by each party against the other, as each became victorious, afforded much triumph to the Pagans, as they have done to every unbeliever. Surely, religion itself is not chargeable with such abuses. The purity of the Nicene Faith does depend upon the majority of voices in the Nicene Council, though to so considerable a majority, when no sinister motive can be proved, when freedom of debate was fully allowed, some deference will be paid by moderate men. When ancient terms and expressions have been misunderstood and perverted, the introduction of others is not only justifiable but necessary. Nor can we forbear wondering, that, after the *Defensio fidei Nicænae*, published by an eminent * Prelate, and after a late Abstract of the Opinions of the Fathers of the three first Centuries, the † Author of which received from this place a just tribute of gratitude, the unlearned should be told, that the Divinity of the Son and Holy Ghost was a doctrine of later date. It would at least be ingenuous to acknowledge that there are some passages in the Fathers which seem to favour such an opinion, and that persons not altogether unac-

* Bishop Bull.

† Dr. Burgh.

quainted

quainted with the learned languages, have deemed them constant and zealous in vindicating the worship of our blessed Saviour. Even Eusebius, who was suspected of Arianism, bears this remarkable testimony. “ By “ Justin and Miltiades, and Tatian and Cle- “ mens, Θεολογεῖται ὁ Χριστός, * *Christ is declared* “ *to be God.* For who does not know the “ books of Irenæus and Melito, and the rest, “ announcing Christ to be God and Man ? “ And how many psalms and songs of the “ Brethren, written from the beginning by “ the Faithful, celebrate Christ the Word of “ God, calling him God ? How then, after “ the doctrine of the Church has been “ preached for the space of so many years, is “ it possible that men should have preached, “ as they say, till the time of Victor ? How “ are they not ashamed to utter these false- “ hoods against Victor, who excommunicated “ Theodotus, the leader and Father of this “ apostacy, denying God, the first who de- “ clared Christ to be a mere man.” In the same chapter, Eusebius charges sectaries with having altered or mutilated the Scriptures.

Need I observe, by the way, that perhaps

* Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. v. c. 28.

he might, among other instances, allude to the well known passage in the fifth chapter of St. John's first Epistle, which is now proved to be genuine but which is very far from being the only support of the Trinitarian cause? The attempts made by some to explain the doctrine by familiar comparisons were as unsuccessful as they were injudicious. Well, therefore, might Justin Martyr say, * “ If I wished “ to shew by human documents or proofs “ the mystery of Christ becoming man you “ ought not to bear with me.” And Hilary, in many parts of his Treatise concerning the Trinity, owns the difficulty of expressing in human language what surpasses human conception. How awful the subject appeared to him may be learnt from the following expression, † *Trepidō in dicto, et me insolens sermo commovet.* No wonder that he who checks presumption in himself should inveigh against it in others; some of whom, he says, conceal such presumption under the appearance of the greatest modesty, *ut verecunde in defensione sit, quod impudenter in sensu est.*

It was not intended, in the foregoing observations, to deny or to vindicate the defects

* Cum Triphone Dial.

† de Trin. lib. 2.

the Primitive Fathers. Of Origen the following judgment is given. *Ubi bene, nemo melius; ubi male, nemo pejus.* Yet, as he advanced in life, he retracted many of his errors, and the want of his learned work, is a serious loss to sacred literature.

Wise and good men, in almost all ages, have advanced some opinions, which, though not perfectly just, are not so absurd, as they are represented. A voluntary dereliction of the vanities, the cares, and the pleasures of this world, for the sake of being more immediately devoted to the service of God, appeared to many of the Fathers meritorious. Perhaps they were confirmed in their notions by an improper interpretation of our Saviour's words in the 19th chapter of St. Matthew, and St. Paul's observations in 1 Cor. vii. concerning Celibacy. Surely they are not answerable for all the abuses of darker ages, and the determination of the Council of Nice on the subject is well known. The truth is, solitude has its temptations, and that life is most pleasing to God, which is most profitable to man.

Many of them seem to condemn a state of warfare. They probably thought that it had a tendency to enflame the passions, and that the habit of destroying or harrassing our fellow-creatures, would weaken and gradually wear away the feelings of humanity. They saw its horrors in their utmost malignity, they saw it carried on without even the pretence of redressing grievances. *Cernes tu itinera latronibus clauja, maria obseffa prædonibus, cruento honore castrorum bella ubique divisa; madet orbis mutuo sanguine, et homicidium cum admittunt singuli, crimen est, virtus vocatur cum publicè geritur; impunitatem sceleribus acquirit non innocentiae ratio, sed fævitiae magnitudo.* Civilized manners have lessened the horrors of war; and we may flatter ourselves, that should we be unfortunately involved in future contention, the same generous spirit will prevail among the contending parties. A proper contempt of life, upon Christian principles, is a noble attainment, and he who stands forth in defence of his country deserves more gratitude than almost any country is willing to shew. Yet, laudable as it is for individuals thus to meet danger, Providence has taught kingdoms at large, that war is a scourge even to the victorious. The advantages of it are more

specious than real ; conquest is more splendid than beneficial : commerce itself with wealth introduces luxury, and multiplies our wants. After we have been dazzled by the exploits of the warrior, let us turn our attention to treaties and compacts, and the delusion will vanish.

It was well said of Bishop Latimer, “ I lay “ no stress upon the Fathers, except when “ they lay a stress upon Scripture.” No tra-
dition, however ancient, can add to the essen-
tials of Faith, but it is one thing to be an in-
ventor, and another thing to be a commen-
tator ; it is one thing to be a dictator, and
another thing to be an auxiliary : the pre-
servation of decency, regularity, and good go-
vernment, has been in all ages principally left
to the prudence of man ; nor will expressions
somewhat too forcible be any argument against
Episcopal authority. “ We are not concerned
“ (to use the words of an eminent defender
“ of Episcopal ordination) for any high flights
“ or any reasonings of the ancients, but barely
“ their testimony about a matter of fact, that
“ Episcopacy was the government of the
“ Church and of apostolical Institution. We
shall have an opportunity, hereafter, of seeing
more

more clearly, that our Church has taught a proper lesson of moderation. And may we, consistently with such moderation, endeavour to select from every age and from every country whatever is amiable, commendable and useful ; may neither prejudice of education, nor malignity, nor presumption, nor fondness for novelty, induce us to reject opinions because they are ancient, or modes of worship because they were adopted in primitive times, and abused or perverted by succeeding ignorance and superstition ; always remembering that our Saviour, so far from altering a Liturgy, in a certain degree unedifying and jejune, selected from it part of his own most perfect Form of Prayer, that much imperfection is to be found in every performance and every establishment of man, but that those who are most discontented, and most clamorous for reformation are generally the least qualified to effect it ; for true wisdom is* *pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

* James 3. xvii.

S E R M O N IV.

P S A L. lxxx. V. 9.

THOU PREPAREDST ROOM BEFORE IT,
THOU DIDST CAUSE IT TO TAKE DEEP
ROOT, AND IT FILLED THE LAND.

THE genuine simplicity of Christian Faith and Christian Worship was but of short duration. After the three, or at most the four, first centuries, every succeeding age became memorable only by a new train of useless, and often worse than useless, ceremonies. The power of the Sovereign Pontiff of Rome soon gained an establishment. Much blood and treasure were lost in an Enterprize, first dictated by mad zeal, and carried on with unabating fury, and with visionary hopes of heavenly assistance. The mansions of learning were but few, and those few

bounded with barbarous compositions, and scholastic jargon. The excellent models of Greece and Rome were little attended to, and scarce understood. The mansions of piety and devotion abounded with idleness, effeminacy, luxury, and every kind of vice. The very altars became a refuge for those who by their crimes had forfeited all pretensions to the pity of their fellow creatures, and the protection of society. The fulminations of the Bishop of Rome had terrified and humiliated kings themselves; had sometimes overturned thrones, or had shaken their foundations. The power of Absolution, which was granted to the Ministers of Christ for the encouragement of repenting sinners, had long been a source of wealth, and a plea for extortion. *The commandments of men were taught for doctrines*, and the clamours for implicit and unbounded deference grew louder, in proportion as the just title to it became weaker.

Unbelievers have enlarged upon these abuses, some of which excite pity rather than indignation, with a design to disparage the Christian Religion; and there may be satire, but there is no argument, in deriding ambitious

tious prelates, and in stiling them at the same moment the successors of meek and indigent Apostles.

Waving therefore that calumny, which carries no real sting, we have reason to rejoice that the revival of learning created a spirit of enquiry. Improvements of every kind are gradual, and attended with difficulty. Succeeding generations are not sensible of every impediment. Rooted prejudices are not removed without great labour and circumspection. Precipitate measures defeat their own purposes.

The effects of Wickliffe's preaching were probably more important than we at present imagine. The fear of punishment may and often does prevent outward and publick opposition, but operates little upon individuals, and upon private societies united together by one common cause. Indeed the Lollards were numerous in defiance of every menace.

The observations which it is intended to make on the conduct and principles of our first Reformers will not admit of methodical arrangement. If we can silence objections

which are frivolous, and answer such as are important, our zeal in the common cause will be animated, and the humblest efforts may be crowned with a small degree of success.

To an impartial enquirer it will perhaps be obvious, that in contemplating the Reformation, as in contemplating other material changes, both friends and enemies have laid too great a stress upon the character and conduct of the several parties concerned. Malignity has exaggerated, mistaken candour has attempted to defend, avowed miscarriages and defects. As if our blessed Master had foreseen the perverseness of men in arguing against his Religion from the conduct of its Teachers, he made him an Apostle who he knew was a Traitor. If his treachery, if the pusillanimity of St. Peter, if the general defection of the Disciples, be no disparagement to the Gospel, with what propriety is so much invective accumulated upon the first Reformers? * Luther, in particular, has been stigmatised with unmerited reproach. Perfect purity of conduct is scarce ever to be

* See Bayle's Life. and Mosheim, 4to edit. V. II.

expected

expected where human nature is concerned. Disappointment and avarice produced in him the first opposition to Papal power; but what begun in resentment might be carried on from better motives. These motives being not subject to human cognizance, must be left to the Tribunal to which alone he is amenable.* As little to the purpose of our adversaries was it to arraign the character of Henry the eighth. Indeed, he is not to be considered as a Reformer, though he first prepared the way. † The learned Commentator on the Laws of England has justly observed, that in his reign “the spirit of persecution was “not abated, but only diverted in a lay chan-“nel;” and, after stating the law of the six articles which established the six most contested points of Popery, he allows “that this “Prince was equally intent on destroying “the Supremacy of the Bishops of Rome, “and establishing all other their corruptions “of the Christian Religion.” Such a mode of conduct promised none of the salutary ef-

* Erasmus says of Luther—*Hominis vita magno omnium consensu probatur. Jam id non leve præjudicium est tantam esse morum integritatem, ut nec hostes reperiant quod calumnientur.* Epistola ad Thomam Cardinalem, as quoted by Atterbury.

† Book 4. C. 2.

fects which an abjuration of Papal authority afterwards produced. It was no remedy against tyranny only to have changed the tyrant ; and however ill qualified Ecclesiasticks in general were to judge what was heresy, however they were disposed to stigmatize with that name any opinion which called in question their own authority, they were, generally speaking, superior in knowledge, and equal in integrity, to those who wrested the spiritual power from their hands. An unrelenting bigotry possessed all ranks of people.

Though it be allowed, according to the learned Commentator abovementioned, that the Reformation was not established till the days of Elizabeth “with temper and decency, “ unfullied with party rancour, or personal “ caprice and resentment,” yet justice and gratitude require us to pay a proper tribute of respect to the memory of those, who began the Reformation in the days of Edward the sixth, some of whom were Martyrs in the days of Mary, and who left more than the outlines, and more than the foundation, of that fabrick, which, we trust, no storms or tempests will ever destroy.

It was never suspected by any of these venerable persons, that in purifying the Church of England from the corruptions of the Church of Rome, no system of faith and practice should be established, that every one should think and act what was right in his own eyes. The Scriptures were translated, *The Institution of a Christian Man* was published, Articles were drawn up with as much care, judgment and expedition as the times admitted, and the Exiles, in Queen Mary's time, had an opportunity of collecting the sense, and profiting by the instructions, of the Reformed Churches abroad. 'Tis true, that with much good they imbibed some prejudices inconsistent with that moderation which was afterwards observed in the national establishment. If asperity of manners, and inflexibility in smaller matters, were chargeable on foreign Churches, some allowance must be made for the times. Even in these days the spirit of controversy has betrayed men into vulgar and indecent language. Surely then Luther and Calvin have a claim to some indulgence; and it may be added, once for all, that religious toleration was very imperfectly understood till a much later period.

In investigating the general principles of the Reformers, we find one generally imputed to them which has created the ridicule of Popery on the one hand, and given a sanction to all the wildness and extravagance of enthusiasts and sectaries on the other. The principle in substance is this: Whatever right any body of men claims to separate from a Church once established, the same right every individual may claim to form a system of doctrines and opinions for himself. The fallacy of abstract propositions often remains undiscovered till they are applied to the several cases which they are supposed to comprehend. In the proposition before us, two points must be proved. First, it must be proved that all errors have the same dangerous tendency; that, for instance, what the Dissenters call excess, in outward decorations, is equally prejudicial to the true spirit of Religion with all those Commandments of Men which are enforced by the Church of Rome, and which it is contended, by all the Reformed Churches, are not to be found in the Gospel. The Sacred Writers only give general rules for the preservation of decency and order, and they always distinguish between what is absolutely necessary and what is merely prudential. Surely, there are different

rent degrees of dissent as well as of assent; surely, all denominations of Christian are not in faith, doctrine and discipline at an equal distance from each other. Nothing but the particular object of controversy can justly be adduced in defence of separation; and till a perfect equality between one object of dispute and another can be proved, which is impossible, every Separatist must stand upon his own ground, must engage with his own peculiar weapons, and must be cautious even of quoting Scripture upon minuter circumstances, which the Sacred Writers never undertook to adjust. It is, for example, very absurd to argue from the acts of an infant Church, assembled under peculiar hardships and discouragement, confined to a small district, and comprehending a few Proselytes, concerning the nature of Church Government, after the whole mass of the people are become Christians. Much more disingenuous is it to argue against Episcopacy from the etymology of a word, which, like other names of authority, care, and superintendance, seems to have had first a general, and afterwards a technical, signification. New offices in all countries and all languages have been frequently pointed out by old appellations.

The

The other point, which must be proved before the proposition can be conclusive, is still more perplexing to the advocates of unlimited liberty : viz. that individuals are qualified by their learning, their ingenuity, and their industry, so to compare Scripture with Scripture, so to interpret the Word of God, as to form for themselves a regular system of doctrines. Instances of gross and notorious delusion are so numerous, that the recital would be as offensive as it is unnecessary. Suffice it to say, that credulity and fanaticism have had unaccountable influence, nor will such influence ever cease as long as a heated imagination shall substitute its reveries in the place of cool reasoning. Nor could ignorant, deluded, unhappy men have gained so great an ascendancy over the minds of their fellow creatures without the aid of pretended inspiration. Perhaps it will be said, that those founders of sects, whose extravagances have been the subject of ridicule or pity, have given rise to systems of belief which many able and ingenious men have deemed rational and consistent. The truth is, grosser absurdities have been renounced, or explained away. A Communion of Christians, formerly the most turbulent, the most extravagant, the most

most devoid of all decency, is now become peaceable, cool, inoffensive. The folly of the Founder was disavowed by succeeding Proselytes, some of whom reduced to a system the scattered materials, which had been collected without method, and were united without coherence. Simplicity of dress and manners, and a proper controul over the morals of their Congregation, has induced the Legislature from time to time to grant them every indulgence which prudence can justify, and has inclined Christians of all denominations to treat them with candour. Did other Sectaries practise the same degree of peaceable modesty, the prejudices of men would gradually subside, unity of affection would not be inconsistent with diversity of opinion, and the accusations, which are uttered with confidence against various denominations, but which constitute no part of their Religion, would be heard no more.

At the same time, it cannot be too frequently or too strenuously insisted upon, that where ignorance, instead of being instructed, attempts, under any pretence whatsoever, to instruct, the instruction must be contemptible, and that legal indulgence granted for such

such a purpose, though it cannot, or will not, be withdrawn, yet it is in deed and in truth a detriment instead of an advantage. Every Zealot for Civil, as well as for Religious, Liberty, is willing to flatter the multitude, in order that he may gain them over to his party, as if truth depended upon numbers, and upon popular applause. The sober minded man appeals to wisdom, diligence, and experience, and disdains the absurd and presumptuous judgment of those Assemblies of ignorant or deluded men, the greater part of whom know not, or consider not, what they say.

The desire of change, when carried to an extreme, is dangerous: it inclines men to be dissatisfied with every thing which already exists. From this extreme our Reformers kept a proper distance, which is the more to be wondered at, because they were sufficiently exasperated by the Persecutions in the reign of Mary.

Excessive prejudice against every thing that wore the aspect of Popery, was chargeable only to the Puritans. The Reformers were sensible that a religion purely mental is

is ill suited to the infirmity of man. Our Lord himself, in the institution of the two Sacraments, condescended to this infirmity. As the principal contest arose concerning the Holy Eucharist, a few observations may be requisite to remove the charge of improper innovation on the one hand, and indolent acquiescence on the other. The primitive Feasts of Love did but too much resemble a common entertainment. To discern the Lord's Body would be difficult even to the most prudent and circumspect. From the grave and solemn offices of Religion it is necessary to exclude the very appearance of festivity. Men have houses to eat and to drink in, they can satisfy the demands of nature, they can indulge the warrantable desire of amusement, at other times, and in more proper places. And what just objection could be brought against the posture of kneeling, when the people were informed it implied no adoration of the elements? Self-examination was recommended as preparatory and beneficial; for who does not know that every religious act is efficacious in proportion as the mind is previously prepared? If the ignorant or the timid have encompassed the holy Eucharist with imaginary terrors, the Reformers are

not answerable for the consequences of other men's mistakes. If, as some would persuade us, it be a mere commemoration of Christ's sufferings; if self examination, occasional abstinence, a purification of the heart from all rancour and resentment, and a solemn renunciation of sin, be unnecessary, wherein will it differ from the plain and constant acknowledgment of Christ's sufferings, with which most of our prayers conclude? The idea of a feast after the sacrifice, familiar to the Jews, and now well established among Christians, guards every true member of the Church of England against each extreme; and if it be said that such an explication, not well understood by the ignorant, creates an inequality among Christians where equal benefit was intended, let us not forget, that every degree of superiority in natural or acquired abilities enables us to perform the offices of religion with additional conviction, and increasing energy. In purity of intention the most ignorant and the most intelligent may be equal. But Religion is a service of the understanding no less than of the will and affections. The dominion of the former should increase in proportion to its cultivation, as all authority gains strength in proportion to the discretion of him who possesses

possesses it. The Philosopher surveys the natural and the intellectual world to a worse than an useless purpose, unless he become more thankful for the blessings of creation, preservation, redemption and sanctification.

A cool and a moderate Reformer, conscious of the difficulties he has to encounter, will extend his care to flagrant and notorious abuses. He will endeavour to retain whatever is rational in the establishment he wishes to amend. Our first Reformers saw nothing anti-christian in the different gradations of honour and dignity which a regular government had rendered necessary. Though some of them, or of their successors, wished for *Chorepiscopi*, yet they found that the administration of ecclesiastical law, and the superintendance of the parochial ministers, was already delegated in various portions and degrees to the inferior clergy, that nothing but ordination, which even St. Jerom allowed to be peculiar to bishops, and confirmation, was exclusively annexed to episcopal dignity. The other names of office, so offensive to men of levelling principles, were not to be found indeed in the Scriptures; and yet, had the Puritans considered the matter coolly, they might have dis-

covered that these very dignities, granted to what we deem the second order, were so many approaches to the equality contended for ; and, as no form of Church Government could be invented which must not give either permanent or occasional superiority to some part of the Clergy, it was more rational in itself, and more conciliatory towards the Church of Rome, to retain the ancient names and the ancient powers, as far as they regarded the care of souls. The Puritans continually objected against the Reformers, that being engaged in a common contest with Popery, they had a right to every indulgence, to a participation of the honours and emoluments of the established Church. It is no part of *our* cause, since the Act of Toleration, to defend the Star chamber or High Commission Courts. Yet, considering the nature of the times, much more indulgence was shewn to individuals of learning and real worth, than could almost have been expected ; and many, from their own insolence, were brought forward to punishment, who, with common prudence and moderation, might have ended their lives in tranquillity. But an exclusion from appointments in the Church was necessary for self-defence. No degree of merit can entitle any one

one to be placed under an establishment which he disapproves. * *He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.* A little knowledge with much modesty will do more service to religion than moroseness or presumption joined with the greatest talents. All possible care was taken in the reign of Elizabeth to procure competent ministers, and wherever their incompetency was manifest, their power was proportionably restrained. The practical discourses enjoined to be read were calculated for the edification of the people, and the high notions of prerogative, with vehement admonitions against rebellion, to be found in them, were accounted for from the history of the times. Even now it would be absurd to state to popular assemblies what these cases of extreme necessity may be, in which subjects might rise against their sovereign. The Liturgy prevented all from offering crude and undigested petitions. The Puritans objected that scripture language was not used, little considering how much of the Scripture was incorporated into the daily service, and that a varied form is a constant comment.

* Matt. xii. 30.

The Assembly of Divines in the following age, when they drew the plan to be observed by their ministers, explain the leading cause of opposition for the Puritans and for themselves, if we can at all consider them as two parties, for *they* openly avow “ *that “ the Liturgy has given great encouragement to an idle and unedifying ministry, “ who chose rather to confine themselves “ to modes made to their hands, than to “ exert themselves in the exercise of the “ *gift of prayer with which our Saviour furnishes all those, whom he calls to that office.*” The same Historian tells us in another place, “ † That there was such a clamour “ against the High Clergy, that they could “ hardly officiate according to the late injunctions, without being affronted, or walk “ the streets in their habits, without being “ reproached as Popish Priests, as Cæsar’s “ friends. The reputation of the Liturgy “ began to sink, reading prayers was called “ useless form of worship, and *a quenching of the Holy Spirit, whose assistances are promised in the matter as well as the manner of our prayers.*” What an accurate delineation is

* Neal, Vol. II. p. 107, 4to. Edit. † Vol. I. p. 662.

this of the prejudices still subsisting among some of the people in a neighbouring Kingdom, and how truly to be pitied is the narrowness of mind which such prejudices ever betray?

The Act of Uniformity has often been censured from the practice of primitive times, in which it was left to the care of every Bishop to prescribe a form of prayer for his own district, or, as they will have it who oppose Episcopacy, to every Presbyter for his own Church. While the Faith continued the same among Christians, the usage, as we believe it to have prevailed, was attended with no inconvenience. But too soon a desire of popularity tempted the * Bishops to gratify the people, whose suffrages had been, or were expected to be, the cause of their promotion. In process of time, each added some new custom or ceremony, till the spirit of religion was lost in external appearances. The Act of Uniformity removed every such inconvenience. It gave permanence to the Book of Common Prayer, and shut out every fanciful invention. And

* See Bingham.

are not the general wants and the general blessings of mankind the same throughout the World? If national calamities or national blessings should call for appropriated services, the Governors of the Church are at hand to provide for such exigencies, and the difficulty of composing suitable services is acknowledged by every dispassionate and intelligent Christian. The language of want and of gratitude should be simple and expressive, too much labour on the one hand, and too much inattention on the other, will be fatal to the real purposes of devotion. But presumption is adventurous and precipitate, while prudence is considerate and cautious.

Hostile as many of the Reformed Churches were to Episcopacy, from the beginning it was not so. For, to use the words of Strype, “ Bullinger, Calvin, and others, offered to “ make King Edward their defender, and to “ have Bishops in their Churches, as there “ were in England, with the tender of their “ service to assist and unite together.*” But notwithstanding many wholesome admonitions sent into this Kingdom when the Puritans consulted some of the foreign di-

* Life of Cranmer, p. 207.

vines upon various subjects of Church discipline, a republican spirit gained ascendancy, and Geneva felt a tyranny equal to that which she had shaken off.

The retention of Episcopacy, was of all other things, the most offensive to the Puritans. All their satire, all their sarcasms and all their wit were exhausted upon this topick. And after so many defences of episcopal government, it might appear either unnecessary or presumptuous to attempt a farther vindication. A few words, however, may not be unseasonable, concerning the worldly dignity annexed to Episcopacy, which has excited so much envy and given so much offence. To infer from the abuses of past times any real ground of suspicion in the present is to make an invidious comparison, where there is no similarity. But men endeavour to persuade us that an attendance upon the legislative body of the kingdom, and an engagement in temporal concerns, are inconsistent with the nature of a spiritual function. Charles the First, who was uniform and consistent in retaining the Bishops, laid great stress upon immemorial usage, which, except in cases glaringly absurd, is a firm

firm and permanent foundation. Many things would otherwise return to their original confusion. And it will be no difficult matter to prove that this part of the Constitution ought not to be given up.

Everyone, liberally educated, prepares himself for the study of Theology by the acquisition of useful knowledge of other kinds. And of this knowledge none is more material to the well being of society than an investigation of the general rights of mankind, and the various modes of adjusting those rights by municipal law. Who ever complained that the labours of the mathematician, the philosopher, or the linguist, were inconsistent with the clerical office? Who pretends to exclude the Clergy even from a moderate attention to those arts which add to the convenience, or contribute to the liberal amusement, of mankind? Why then should the character of a Legislator, so truly sacred and so truly important, be thought unsuitable to their vocation, or inconsistent with it's more immediate duties? Every wise government will endeavour to secure the accumulated wisdom of every profession. Attendance upon the duties of each gives life and vigour

vigour to the faculties, quickness of thought, and facility of communication.

But it is suggested, that popular elections would remedy some defects in the present nomination of bishops as well as of the inferior Clergy. So fatal was the desire of popularity in primitive times, that a law was made to prohibit an occasional superintendant from filling the vacant see. The people are only judges of the morals; they are captivated by appearances, by attainments which are neither the effect of ingenuity nor of industry. Dignity of character is often lost in an endeavour to please them.

A fondness for pastoral poetry and rural retirement has led some into a mistaken opinion that the inferior classes of men are, in general, sincere, industrious and inoffensive. Experience evinces the very reverse, and there is probably most virtue in those, who, by a moderate cultivation of the mind are free from the corruptions of gross ignorance, and yet are not tempted by an excess of wealth, and the flattery which wealth creates, to desert the path of innocence and real honour.

We

We have studied the Ancients to little purpose, if we have not learnt a proper contempt for the crude opinions of the vulgar. And truly miserable is the lot of those, whose success depends upon the caprice of the multitude. Still more wretched are they whom the congregation can deprive of the very power of ministering in holy things. Many, under all or some of these circumstances, have been happy that they could recede with honour from a charge to which so little honour was annexed, and that they could have recourse to other employments, attended with greater advantage and less dependance. *

" I must observe to you (says a learned Prelate,) that in parishes and places, where the people chuse their own ministers, there are the greatest divisions and quarrels, the greatest feuds and passions remarkable; as unqualified ministers as in other places, and, perhaps it may be said also, the greatest number of Dissenters from the established Church. Nothing hath been the cause of greater violence and strife, and ill will amongst neighbours, than this choice; and the time of election is com-

* Reasonableness of Conformity, 276, fol. edit.

" monly

“ monly the time of heat and anger, and it
“ ends often in a bad choice, and in the
“ alienation of the minds of many men from
“ their brethren, and from their minister,
“ worthy or not worthy”.

The Puritans complained, that though the Doctrine of Predestination was to be found in the Articles of the Church, yet they were prohibited from preaching it. The truth is, from the very beginning of the Reformation, some of the wisest men were well aware of the difficulty of the subject, and yet were compelled, by the necessity of the times, to frame an Article, which, comprehending two parties widely differing from each other, is more an article of peace than of information. We are no strangers in these days what gloominess on the one hand, and what presumption on the other, the doctrine has created. Instead of that comfortable hope of a gracious reception from the Father of Mercies, which every true Christian feels when he enters or leaves the House of God, we see many unhappy men entering or leaving their conventicles with downcast looks and sad countenances, their health is gradually impaired, and the pleasures of friendly intercourse

course are totally lost. We may say of their Religion, with truth, that it hath neither the promise of this life, nor of that which is to come. And we may assert, with equal truth and confidence, that no government in any age could issue forth a more wise, a more useful, and a more consolatory prohibition on the subject of Religion, than this very Prohibition which the Puritans so severely condemned.

That the Articles concerning grace, faith, and good works, lean towards the side of enthusiasm, is neither to be condemned nor wondered at. The errors to which they were opposed will at once explain and justify such language. It is a familiar but expressive comparison, that, to make the crooked straight, we must bend the contrary way. Opposite errors in our times require a different kind of religious instruction, and yet it is a false and malicious charge against the established Clergy, that they do not sufficiently enforce the necessity of faith, and the true efficacy of grace.

The advocates for a new establishment, and the opposers of all establishments, have enquired,

enquired, whether, upon the supposition that the Reformation had been deferred till our days, the Articles would not have been materially different from the present. No advantage is given by allowing that they certainly would. In proportion to the dangers which surround us, we naturally prepare our defence. That he who engages to support a system may, in the progress of life, find, or, which is the same as to the effect upon his conduct, imagine, himself mistaken, cannot be denied. But the evils arising from ignorance, instability, and presumption, are infinitely greater than any one establishment ever produced; for in all of them we must often distinguish the misconduct of individuals from the seeming or the real imperfections of the establishments themselves.

Articles, like human laws, are liable to perversion, evasion, or misconstruction. The prudence and the industry of Interpreters diminishes those evils which it cannot prevent. Ours are usefully retained, as comprehending a history of the religion of the times in which they were framed, and as expressing the reasons of our separation from the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the Puritans on the other. And though he, who keeps the moderate

moderate path between two parties, be in danger of displeasing each, yet he gains the approbation of the cool and considerate; and if party zeal deprive him of much praise, and subject him to much censure, during his life-time, posterity will applaud his magnanimity, and vindicate the propriety of his conduct.

Our Reformers, aided by the civil power, laid the foundation of religious liberty; succeeding times enacted laws to strengthen what was weak, and to amend what was imperfect. The hierarchy is disarmed of all its terrors; ecclesiastical law is administered principally by the laity; and that power in temporal concerns, which by a forced construction was first granted to the Church, and continued to be exercised by spiritual persons, is now in the hands of professional men, acting with all the regularity and accuracy of other courts. Let every attempt to excite jealousy between one kind of jurisdiction and another be opposed with unremitting industry; and if the opposition should not meet with deserved success, may it never betray us into murmuring and discontent, but animate our endeavours to be true and faithful ministers of the Prince of Peace.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V.

2 C O R. I. 24.

NOT FOR THAT WE HAVE DOMINION OVER
YOUR FAITH, BUT ARE HELPERS OF
YOUR JOY.

IF the Church of England, assisted as she has been from time to time by the Legislature, claimed an absolute authority over the belief of mankind, she might be justly charged with intolerance; and the words of the text, instead of being what we apprehend them to be, the rule of her conduct, would only be the sentence of her condemnation. To claim greater deference than was claimed by the Apostles themselves would be the very height of presumption.
* A well known Historian, who omits no opportunity of ridiculing or disparaging reli-

* Hume.

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gion,

gion, under the pretence of censuring some of the particular defects of its professors, has asserted that Priests of all denominations are bigots. That he, who has been educated according to the tenets of any one communion, whose inclination has led him to examine those tenets, to refute the arguments of gainsayers, to meet every objection, and to find out new reasons by which his faith is corroborated, should, during the progress of his enquiries, be animated with increasing zeal, is natural and unavoidable. The same thing happens in the pursuit of any other kind of knowledge. The philosopher, the mathematician, the philologist, the antiquarian, and the cultivator of any of the fine arts, all of them claim some indulgence from mankind, if their favourite employment fill them with a peculiar degree of ardour. Such ardour increases their diligence, and causes even the effusions of fancy to be received with candour. The solid advantages accruing to society from their labours infinitely counterbalance any inconveniences arising from a few conjectures, apparently visionary and ill supported. Essentials all the time retain their dignity and importance. Why then should that candour which is shewn to others

others be denied to the Ministers of Christ ? Is Theology a science of less utility than others ? Does it not derive some weight even from ingenious opinions, to which future industry may give additional sanction ? No dangerous consequences are to be feared, as long as a proper distinction is made between that evidence which is direct and that which is collateral, between absolute certainty and mere probability.

How far the charge of intolerance may be justly brought against individuals, is as unnecessary to enquire as it would be impossible to determine.

It is intended in the following discourse, to point out the unreasonableness of such a charge, against the establishment itself, by vindicating those two parts of it which our adversaries complain of as most uncharitable.

The first is, the Sacramental Test.

The second is, the Athanasian Creed.

And first, let us consider the Sacramental Test.

It were easy to prove, if the proof could answer any good purpose, that when the

Presbyterian Party prevailed in this kingdom, they did not give a perfect pattern of that lenity which their successors have already experienced, much less of that which has been so often solicited. Perhaps party rancour in all Christians is much abated, and it would be unjust to appropriate that censure to any one denomination, which, in certain degrees, was due to all. It is much more to our purpose to remind men, that though the opinion of a majority in any kingdom be no test of truth, yet it must be the principle of a religious establishment to be supported by the Civil Power. If those, who think differently, be allowed the free exercise of their religion, as far as may be consistent with the support of Christianity and the well being of society, they have all that they can reasonably claim, and they ought not to ask for more. The example of the principal and of inferior magistrates is of peculiar efficacy in recommending and enforcing the national religion. If honour and emolument were held out to the opposers of such religion, they might in time become formidable by their number. Exclusion from offices of trust is but a negative punishment, and has been, upon some occasions, a real benefit. That he who is invested with

with additional power of being useful to others, should receive the Holy Communion, may be attended with many salutary effects, if the person receiving it consider the Legislature as addressing him to the following pur-
port. “ You are now advanced to a more
“ respectable station. An additional trust
“ requires additional fidelity. The Holy
“ Eucharist will, or ought to, banish from
“ your heart all malice and all resentment.
“ Let your inclination to do good increase
“ with your power. After the utmost care
“ and vigilance, the infirmities of human
“ nature are too discernible. Approach
“ His Altar, commemorate His sufferings,
“ who alone can succour you in the hour
“ of temptation. Comfortable and edify-
“ ing as this solemn service is, let your pre-
“ sent attendance be an earnest of future zeal
“ in that worship, which remembers all that
“ are in authority, with so much the greater
“ earnestness, because their conduct more ma-
“ terially affects the welfare of the commu-
“ nity.”

After the utmost lenity and liberality which can be shewn to Sectaries, experience has taught us that they are suspicious of being

slightly regarded, that they shew a manifest partiality to others of the same communion; and the levelling principle, which they support in ecclesiastical concerns, now and then shews itself also in civil. Their indifference to the establishment, their hostility to a part of the legislative body, their clamours against the prerogative, and their democratical sentiments, justified, as they pretend, by the Revolution, render them improper judges of the rights of king and people. If, in the Roman Empire, the ecclesiastical resembled the civil arrangement; if, as a learned * foreigner hath justly observed, the same resemblance subsist in England, an obvious conclusion will be drawn, that, as a regular subordination is requisite to preserve regularity in spiritual as well as temporal government, similar methods will be most effectual to preserve it. The alliance between Church and State will hereby be more closely cemented, the general turn and genius of a people will be more judiciously consulted, the friend of monarchy will become the friend of episcopacy, and he, whose habits of thinking, incline him to shew deference to the dispensers of law and justice, will not withhold it from the dispensers of the Gospel. Fully sensible of the dignity of them

* Mosheim.

all,

all, he will be little inclined to censure or to cavil at those outward means, by which dignity must be supported.

In favour of them who possess military command, connivance and annual indemnity have all the effects of a dispensation. It does not, however, seem improper to take care, that they, who live in constant danger, should be more especially habituated to attend on divine ordinances, and, in particular, on the Holy Eucharist, with an injunction, that all those, who conscientiously differ, should receive it from their own ministers. Military government is established upon its own maxims, and demands greater degrees of subjection. It precludes that turbulence which distracts the community at large; its adjudications are concise, and admit of no tedious litigation, for the cases to be decided are not complex.

Let us, moreover, recollect, that many of the Dissenters have deviated from their own establishment; that they have sounded an alarm against establishments in general; that a proposal to subscribe to the Scriptures might eventually join Christians and Mahometans

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together, and that to endeavour to overturn what we deem essential doctrines of Christianity, and to sow dissatisfaction and discontent among the people, is neither conciliatory nor grateful. That this is the language of a considerable body, is self evident, and it justifies the present restriction more than a thousand arguments.

Let us proceed to the consideration of the Athanasian Creed.

Its antiquity is often called in question. The learned * Historian of it has proved that it is of more ancient date than is generally imagined, and that a similar one was composed very early by John, Patriarch of *Antioch*. Whatever be it's date, it's agreement with Scripture must decide it's title to our approbation. We may, perhaps, be reminded that some of our own most sanguine friends have wished to expunge it. But one of them † lived to retract his opinion, and a friend of truth is not to be overawed by authority, however respectable, nor silenced by popular clamour. And, for the sake of clear investigation, let us consider, in the first place, the damnatory sentence at the beginning as a general proposi-

* Waterland.

† Chillingworth.

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tion; and, secondly, consider its application to the particular doctrines of the Creed.

And first, let us consider the damnable sentence as a general proposition. Many Unbelievers and some Christians, suppose opinions to be involuntary, and therefore harmless. But let them consider how far this will carry them. Every wild effusion of fancy, every sentiment that may tend to disturb society, or to infringe upon the rights of individuals, may be pardoned or vindicated upon such a supposition. And those deluded men, who, under the plea of Scriptural Authority, maintained that all the property of Christians was common, ought, in a religious view, to have been excused, whatever animadversion the civil magistrate might take. It is true, that all absurd and heretical opinions are not equally dangerous, nor imply an equal depravation of mind. So neither are all vices. Different degrees of censure must be apportioned to the different degrees of malignity. Of the use of those talents which God hath given us, we must one day render a strict account, and it will then, and then only, be known, whether every man have made a proper use of those with which he was entrusted. In the mean time

time, he is to be admonished of this, lest idleness or perversion should shelter themselves under the plea of ignorance.

Nothing is more expressly revealed in Holy Scripture, than that he who does not believe the Christian Religion shall be condemned. The Unbeliever says he makes not his appeal to the tribunal which Christians have erected against him, and that, therefore, such a sentence can carry no terrors with him. But does he think himself a moral agent, accountable to his Creator for his thoughts, words, and actions? If he proceed even thus far, he must condemn any notion which undermines the foundation of his boasted Religion of Nature. By parity of reason, Christians may condemn whatever opinions are subversive of their Religion. There is no one point upon which our Divines have insisted with more justice, and with greater strength of argument, than this, namely—That a rejection of the terms of salvation subjects men to the danger of eternal perdition. They maintain that man cannot be saved by his own deservings, and that, if he will not be saved by the merits of Christ, his lot is most truly deplorable.

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If it be said that unbelief may arise from a disorder, or from a defect, in the understanding, every such case is, by implication, excepted. In those offences which are punishable by the laws of the land, previous enquiry is made how far the intention was concerned, and one of the greatest injuries which one can commit against another, will be pardoned, if previous malice and previous intention can be disproved. Whoever, therefore, interprets the sentence without such a qualification as is common to all statutes and laws whatsoever, charges us with an absurdity which he himself has created.

Moreover, this sentence is deemed by us declaratory of the general will of God, and does not imply an absolute exclusion of every culpable individual from his mercy. We know not what allowances may be made for prejudice of education, or for those prepossessions which improper associations, or wrong notions of Christian liberty, have introduced. And, if such a concession should be deemed an evasion of its strict and obvious meaning, which is very far from being intended, let us advert to other denunciations of vengeance against unquestionable offences. In the Commination

tion Service, the curses of God against all sinners are rehearsed, and acknowledged by the people to be justly due. But did any thinking person ever imagine that he was condemning himself or others to eternal perdition ? Did he ever suppose that what is designed to lead the serious Christian to an abhorrence of sin and a sincere repentance should be a sanction for uncharitableness or sink him in despair ? And if a general detestation of wicked practices imply no right nor any intention of condemning individuals, why should such right appear to be claimed, why should such intention be imputed, in repeating what we deem the denunciation of heaven, against the open opposer, or the treacherous supporter of the Christian Faith ? *Knowing the terrors of the Lord*, we endeavour to persuade men to come to the knowledge of the Truth.

But we have been frequently told, that we retain the language and the spirit of Popery. Let us not be terrified by invidious names. Many good and useful things have been brought into neglect and contempt by odious appellations. Not to enter into the causes of our separation from the Church of Rome, and disapproving, as we hope many of the Romanists

manists themselves disapprove, the temporal punishment of such heresies as must be left to a more awful Tribunal, we agree in one point, That whatever is revealed in Scripture, is required to be believed by every Christian upon pain of the heavy wrath of God, and a final condemnation, in case of obstinate perseverance. If Transubstantiation, Prayers for the dead, Indulgences, Purgatory or any other part of their Institution, which Protestants reject, had been found in the sacred writers, our opposition would not be warrantable, we should be *found to fight against God.*

Having considered the damnatory clause as a general proposition, we are in the second place to consider how it is applied in the Creed itself.

We must ever lament that the misapplied curiosity of men should have made it at all necessary to enlarge upon mysterious doctrines. It might have been fortunate for the peace and tranquillity of the Christian Church, if the Apostle's Creed had been sufficient. *But since men will be wise above what is written,* some remedy must be found out, which may either satisfy or restrain their curiosity. And who-
ever

ever peruses the several parts of the Creed before us, will find, that so far from creating minute enquiries concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, it is more especially calculated to discountenance and prevent them. When the mind enters into a laborious and minute investigation of things which it cannot comprehend, insensible of the narrow limits of its own powers, it will be led to substitute some vague or visionary idea in the place of solid and useful truth. The union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ is not to be explained; and when we are instructed to say, that “as the reasonable soul “ and flesh is one man, so God and Man is “ one Christ,” the *manner* of union is not explained, for we know not *how* the soul is united to the body. Unity of person and character in the blessed Jesus is asserted and enforced against all those who have been led to deny a mystery which they could not explain, the mystery of God manifest in the flesh, a mystery which even the Angels desired to look into, and which could not at all have existed, if he had been a mere martyr and a mere man.

That every person in the ever blessed Trinity is God and Lord, no one denies, who be-

believes in the Trinity, but to speak of them collectively as three Gods and three Lords, has an air of Polytheism. Sublime truths require modesty and caution in our expressions, and whatever checks presumption, prepares the mind for the reception of sound and useful doctrine. The abuse of Scriptural language first occasioned a deviation from it in Creeds, and common candour will compel all parties to acknowledge the difficulty of finding proper words to express so much as it was intended for us to know, and no more. This difficulty increases when the sense of what originally was delivered in one language, is to be expressed in another. Incomprehensible does not convey to the English reader the idea of *immensus*; and *essence* might probably have been more proper, or less liable to misconstruction, than *substance*, as the latter may appear to some to carry with it an idea of materialism. If it be said that men in general know nothing of the errors alluded to, that many of them are forgotten or disregarded, and that peaceable minds ought not to be perplexed, we may answer, that it is perfectly consonant to the nature of all elementary instruction, to state negatively, what is

is not to be maintained, and positively what is ; and that he, who adheres to the affirmative part, virtually renounces the negative.

The learned can read the Scriptures in the original language ; they can consult the annals of the Church ; they can trace out every sect to it's original founder. They can, except in cases of gross contradiction and absurdity, give regular and consistent accounts of each, - they can see the dangers to which others have been exposed ; but, with respect to a particular knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity, what great difference is there between the learned and the unlearned ? *Canst thou, by searching, find out the Almighty ? Verily he is a God, that hideth himself.* Now, admitting that some part of this Creed is calculated only for more improved understandings, the less enlightened part of Christians can leave out what is minute, and acquiesce in general terms. And from the very nature of the institution, this confession of Faith is deemed of less general use than the Nicene and the Apostles' Creed, upon both of which it may be considered as a comment.

As the essential points inculcated in all are the same, it is difficult to say how he who disbelieves

disbelieves one should not disbelieve another. The truth is, that Unitarians, Arians, and Socinians, will be content with nothing short of an universal renunciation of the whole doctrine of the Trinity; and, in the mean time, feel great indignation to be excluded from ministering in holy things. Some, indeed, have been admitted into the ministry upon conditions which they themselves openly and avowedly disapprove. The pretence of performing substantial service to the Church is alledged in their vindication. But such a pretence is an instance of vanity and folly. It is an instance of vanity, to suppose that, after so much has been written, and when so many persons of real knowledge are daily admitted to the sacred function, the adherence of a few individuals to the pastoral care should be of so much importance. Without diminishing their number, or depreciating their abilities, *great*, and, we trust, successful, would be the *company of preachers*, notwithstanding their departure. It is an instance of folly to suppose that their flock have such a peculiar veneration for them. For what ought to be imagined concerning those who can enter the Holy Temple, and offer supplications to God the Son, and God the

Holy Ghost, and yet disbelieve them to be objects of adoration? Is not the sin of hypocrisy and duplicity aggravated, when committed in the more immediate presence of him, *unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid?* Can such persons be real objects of veneration amongst the people? Neither rectitude of morals in other respects, if it can exist under such equivocation, nor superiority of talents, will preserve them from censure. Moderate abilities, joined with an honest heart, will do more real service among the ignorant than the most brilliant powers disgraced by singularity and moroseness. Much more consistent and much more praise worthy was the conduct of those, who seceded from the Church, when its Articles and Liturgy were no longer satisfactory. Let others of the same sentiments profit, in the true sense of profiting, by such examples; let them secure a good name, which is better than riches, by a manly resignation of that which they cannot retain with honour, when they condemn the terms upon which it was first conferred.

The statute which inflicts a penalty, upon such as shall be convicted of preaching openly against

against the doctrine of the Trinity, has not only lost all it's terror, and all it's force, but is sarcastically said to be the only argument of which we are in possession. So grateful is the return made for more than legal toleration. We fear no enquiry, we wish to silence the gainsayer more by argument than by proceeding even to the just extent of our power. The experience of past times, and of the present, has taught us, that some men would become famous even under lawful Animadversion, who might otherwise mix with the mass of their fellow creatures, and be forgotten. At the same time, such persons, whatever name they assume, would have had no reason to complain, if, while they are allowed to pray to God the Father *only*, they should be restrained by the Civil Magistrate from speaking irreverently of the Son and Holy Ghost. Common gratitude and common decency require modesty and reserve from them. And in order that we may not on this subject even *appear* to be carried to an extremity of zeal, a strong and apposite illustration may be adduced in our favour. Perhaps there is no doctrine of the Church of Rome which Protestants have more uniformly opposed than that of Transubstantiation. We are called

upon to disavow the belief of it in the most particular manner, when we renew our engagements of fidelity and allegiance to our Sovereign. What should we think of a Protestant, residing and protected in a Popish country, if he should treat the Host with open contempt? To ridicule or inveigh against an error which he could not remove would be unavailing; to give disgust to a people, under whose guardianship, perhaps under whose courtesy and hospitality, he lives in satisfaction and security, would argue a perversion of mind more fatal to true Christianity than the greatest speculative error.

But why, it is often said, are we so zealous in enforcing doctrines merely speculative? The answer is, we believe them to be inculcated in Scripture, essential to the Christian Religion, and not merely speculative. The Son and the Holy Ghost are each of them said to be sent by the Father, each of them contributes to the great work of our salvation. To refuse them divine honour is unquestionably to deny their divine power. And who shall expect benefit from the exertions of that power which he denies? Who shall receive that assistance for which he disdains to supplicate?

plicate? We do not presume to fix limits to divine mercy. But surely we always endanger our title to it, when we reject the conditions upon which it is granted. The humble Christian hopes for no benefit from the Gospel Covenant, but from a firm reliance on the merits of his Saviour, and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Christianity receives additional importance, and commands additional reverence, from the dignity of it's Author. So much may be concluded from the Parable of the Husbandmen, and from the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, ** And if the word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.*

Humility is enforced by the wonderful humiliation of Christ. Abhorrence of sin increases in proportion to the value of the ran-

* Heb. ii. v. 2, 3, 4.

som required for its expiation. Our conviction of the necessity of such an expiation depends upon the absolute certainty of it's having been offered and accepted, Are we in distress? Our assurance of the love of God is increased by the great event which he brought about in Bethlehem. *† Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* ** He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* Were the Socinian doctrine true, the force of such reasoning would vanish. Nor would our blessed Lord, after having assumed peculiar authority, and accepted peculiar appellations, be a perfect pattern of humility. His claims of preeminence, enforced by the predictions of the Prophets, and the preaching of his Apostles, would eventually tend to his degradation, and their dishonour. They would be found false witnesses.

From what has been said, it is hoped that every true friend of Christianity will receive

† Rom. v. 7, 8.

** Rom. viii. 32.*

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the articles of faith, contained in this Creed, with deference and godly fear, not as deriving their authority from the will of man, but from the Word of God. Let him ever remember, that though no rubrick be inserted for the purpose, yet we are warranted by reason and common sense to affirm what was once intended to be declared by a rubrick, “ That “ the condemning clauses are to be under- “ stood as relating to those, who obstinately “ deny the substance of the Christian Faith.” The Creed had a very general reception among Eastern and Western Churches. And, to use the words of it’s accurate Historian, “ may it ever continue in full force, till the “ Christian Churches can find out (which “ they will not easily do) a juster, or “ founder, or more accurate, form of faith “ than this is.” And may he, *who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, evermore keep us steadfast in this faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end.*

S E R M O N VI.

NUMB. XVI. Part of the 11th Verse.

THOU AND ALL THY COMPANY ARE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD.

NOTHING has created greater contention between the Sectaries and ourselves than proper modes of Christian Worship. They seem to wage perpetual war against every part of our institution ; against our temples, our ceremonies, our vestments ; against prescribed forms of prayer in general, and against the Common Prayer in particular. It is intended, in the following discourse, to answer their most formidable objections.

And first, let us consider their objections against our temples, our ceremonies, and our vestments.

vestments. These are invidiously said to be the inventions and ordinances of man. A confession that they are can be no argument against their propriety and utility. Why should man be blamed for regulating that which is evidently left in his power? Matters of ornament or decency require no abstruse reasoning, no laborious investigation, much less do they require the aid of inspired penmen; and, if some small deference be paid to the prejudices of the people, there can be no just cause of complaint. But if no distinction between the primitive times and the darker ages, or between the darker ages and our own, be attended to, if the use must be confounded with the abuse, every argument we can bring will be superfluous. Should enquiry be made where we will fix the boundary, it is obvious that in things commonly called indifferent, but only so called in opposition to essentials, an exact boundary is not necessary to be fixed; and no moderate man would depart from a Church merely upon the supposition of her retaining more externals than he heartily approves. No society could act collectively with harmony and efficacy, if individuals did not give way in things

things of smaller moment. * Indeed, many wise and good men, little inclined to vexatious animadversion, or uncharitable censure, have been of opinion that somewhat more of the Romish ritual, or of outward decoration, might have been retained without injury to religion. An attachment to ceremonies was objected with much malignity and invective against a Prelate of the last century, who died a sacrifice to that intolerance, from which, in the days of his power, he had not been entirely free. Happy would it have been for this kingdom, if his judgment had never erred more than in the ceremonious consecration of a Church, or in giving additional splendour to the worship of the Almighty.

Various are the methods by which popularity has been acquired. Sometimes austerity and mortification, sometimes, on the contrary, an attempt to reconcile religion and sensuality together, has led to reputation and pre-eminence. None of the least fascinating arts is that by which the pride of man is flat-

* Wida, Archbishop of Cologn, was desirous of retaining all the religious ceremonies of the Church of Rome which were not impious. His plan most resembled that of England. Bayle's Dictionary.

tered,

tered, by which he is placed above his real state and condition, and invested, as it should seem, with greater dignity and honour. An unwary person may be captivated by the following kind of reasoning. “ Consider that “ thy tabernacle of clay must shortly be put “ off, and that the more thou abstractest thy- “ self from earthly objects during thy conti- “ nuance here, the better wilt thou be pre- “ pared for that spiritual life which thou art “ to lead hereafter. The vanity of man im- “ poses religious rites and ceremonies, and the “ authority even of Jesus Christ himself is al- “ ledged in his defence. But knowest thou “ not, that where there is a spiritual mean- “ ing, the symbols or tokens, which express “ that spiritual meaning, are nothing of them- “ selves but lifeless matter, and may there- “ fore be done away? As well mightest thou “ think that the feet of the disciples are to be “ washed, as that the last supper is to be re- “ presented by bread and wine. And what is “ Baptism but the purification of the inward “ man? Canst thou think that the sprinkling “ of water should be at all effectual in taking “ away sin? How strange were it, after God “ hath commanded us to worship him *in spi- rit and in truth*, if that worship be disguised “ by

“ by splendid and glittering appearances? *Is not heaven his throne? Is not earth his foot-stool?* What house shall be made suitable to His majesty, who hath himself created all things? Let His temple be fixed in the the hearts of His people. *Be thyself the altar, the sacrifice, and the priest.*” All these sentiments are too elevated for our present weakness and infirmity. We cannot divest ourselves of a regard to appearances; and they best know our frame, who have condescended to the prejudices of the outward man, without forgetting the edification and improvement of the inward.

It were easy to prove that the case of the two Sacraments, and that of washing the feet of the disciples, are altogether different. By the Sacraments we are made partakers of all the benefits of the Christian covenant, we engage to believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and to practise every christian virtue. Thus much is allowed by all Christians; and to us who believe Christ to have been a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, they administer peculiar consolation. But what was our Lord’s intention in washing the feet of his disciples? To exemplify the virtue of humility,

mility, which may be exemplified by any other instance of benevolent condescension. The representation of this instruction by an Act, though founded upon too literal an interpretation, is continued in the Church of Rome without any glaring impropriety. The awfulness of the Scene which it calls to remembrance, is increased by the artless simplicity with which St. John has described it. Of externals in general we can only say, that excess should be avoided, that in our Church it has been avoided, that our ceremonies are few and expressive, that our vestments are suited to the nature of the sacred function, that in all important offices it is necessary to distinguish between the individual and the publick character he sustains, that some of the Dissenters have acknowledged the use of sacerdotal habits, by partly adopting them, and that the less we assimilate the outward circumstances of worship to the outward circumstances of common life, the greater reverence we shall express in the congregation of the faithful. If musick, if any other of the fine arts, can add to our devotion, without drawing our attention and affection from Him who is to us all in all, why should they be despised or rejected? What assisted and animated a

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Jew may surely animate a Christian. The harp and the cymbal accompanied the Songs of Sion. But as the use of them was not enjoined by the ceremonial law, so neither can the abrogation of the one be conclusive for the abrogation of the other. To alledge that musick excites more curiosity than piety is to argue from the abuse, and the reasoning, if worthy attention at all, would be partly valid against spiritual instruction in Churches. In fact, though the love of novelty or of variety be too predominant, yet it does not altogether exclude better motives, even in its most unjustifiable usurpation, and he who entered the House of God with little purpose of being made a better Christian, may return from it with unexpected zeal, and almost involuntary impressions. Without an inward call, his mind may be thoroughly affected, though, like the angry Conqueror of the Liberties of Rome, in the case of Ligarius, he thought himself uninterested in the subject matter, and only wished for eloquence and harmony.

To consecrate places for publick worship, is to confer no inherent sanctity upon those places, and the Almighty is only said, by a figure, to be more immediately present in them, because

cause he is, or ought to be, more immediately present to our minds. We are supposed to have left our worldly cares and worldly distinctions behind us; outward reverence itself is nothing, unless it express and increase inward humility.

The objections against prescribed forms of prayer in general, and against the Common Prayer in particular, are now to be considered.

Prescribed forms of prayer have every sanction which long usage in the Jewish and the Christian Church can give them, they have the sanction of our Lord himself. They are attended with many advantages to the people, who knowing beforehand what petitions they are to offer up, and having no desire of novelty to be gratified, can apply themselves without distraction to the several duties of publick worship. If inspiration be pretended to, we can only say that the effects must enable us to judge of such pretensions. It is little short of blasphemy to ascribe to the suggestion of the Spirit what is frequently futile and absurd, or, if rational, is premeditated.

But want of variety is frequently insisted upon. Let men banish from religion the gratification

tification of ignorance and caprice. Let them in this, and in all other instances, firmly withstand, and endeavour to overcome, absurd prejudices. If the recurrence of the same service be so extremely offensive, why may we not wish for *another sun to rule the day, and other stars to govern the night?*

* Why affect a change in words when the

* If you still think the variation of the phrase is so mighty a matter, let us try it, if you please, in one or two instances. We, in the confession of our sins to Almighty God, constantly say, "We have offended against thy holy laws." You perhaps say at one time, We have despised thy commandments, at another time, We have committed iniquity, and at a third, We have done amiss, and dealt very wickedly. We sue for pardon, and restoration to the divine favour, saying, "restore thou "them that are penitent." You, it may be, say now, forgive us all our sins, which we truly and sincerely repent of ; then, We confess our wickedness, and are sorry for our sin, do thou forgive it : and the next time, perhaps, use other words of the same import ; returning, after a proper time, to the first expressions, which I take to be one of the secrets of extempore prayer. Is it now possible for you to think that the attention of any serious man will depend upon his using constantly one of these forms, or interchangeably, the other ? If it be so, it is a sign he is not much wearied with the burden of his sins, nor very solicitously concerned about the forgiveness of them.

You will ask, perhaps, if I should not myself be weary of a Sermon, though it were ever so good, a hundred times repeated. To be sure, sir, I should ; but the cases are widely different. I should be weary of a sermon so often repeated, because, being stale, I should be no longer entertained with it, or because, having so often heard it, it would teach me nothing new, but what it had taught me long and many times before. But when I go to *prayers*, I do not propose to myself entertainment, or information, or instruction, as your people generally seem

subject matter continues the same? Where the love of variety could be gratified without inconvenience, care has been taken to indulge it. Different psalms and different portions of scripture, together with various transitions from one act of devotion to another, are a sufficient relief to a rational mind.

The Liturgy is sometimes charged with tautology, and we are forbidden, say our adversaries, by our Lord himself, to *use vain repetitions*. The Pharisees entertained unworthy notions of the Almighty, as if the efficacy of prayer depended upon it's continuance, and as if the Almighty were to be prevailed upon by mere shew, or importunity. But surely all repetitions are not vain. The Poet and the Orator will convince us of the

to do. They seem to regard a prayer with the same attention they do a sermon, and they expect from the one the same sort of instruction or entertainment that they look for from the other; which the perpetual repetition of the same prayer not affording, they are disgusted at it, and naturally fall into a drowsy inattention to it. Whereas, if they would lay aside all expectation of having their judgments informed, or their imaginations entertained and diverted by the prayers of the Church, and look for nothing in them besides a representation of the real wants and desires of a Christian to Almighty God, in proper and suitable expressions, the frequent rehearsal of them would not be such a weariness, and they would join in them with great devotion and delight. White's Letter to a Gentleman dissenting from the Church of England, p. 38, 39.

contrary

contrary, whenever they wish to impress any idea more strongly. Musick has it's popular strains, which, however frequently they occur, are heard with increasing pleasure. In many of our amusements, which are supposed to attract by gratifying our fondness for novelty, there is a reiteration of the same incidents, a fulfilling of the same wishes. Are truths, then, most highly interesting to the sons of men, less proper to be frequently inculcated, less necessary to be carefully remembered? The repetition of the Lord's Prayer, though occasioned by the union of services once used separately, is a constant admonition of the wisdom and goodness of our blessed Master, and a check to the least presumption and confidence in our own performances.

The chief end of all our services, as of our existence itself, is the glory of God, who wills the happiness of all his creatures. The doxology repeated causes this primary purpose to be uppermost in our thoughts, and every new subject gives additional animation to the same form of praise.

The solemn invocations for mercy from the three persons in the ever blessed Trinity have a sameness of words, but a distinction

of signification. We are taught by the Christian Religion to hope for different blessings from each, and that hope naturally suggests appropriated petitions. In short, no censure is applicable to any repetitions in the Liturgy, which is not applicable to the choruses of the Psalms themselves.

In the course of our Services we supplicate more than once for all orders and degrees of men, in their publick and private capacities; but though the objects be the same, the matter of our prayers is diversified. The leading idea is perhaps the same, a general expression will comprehend succeeding particulars. The suffrages are a compendium of all that we can request. That compendium is naturally dilated in the following prayers. We have variety, but not without some degree of resemblance.

Our Services have now and then been censured in respect to their duration. Some think them too short, others too tedious, which is a presumptive proof at least that we have kept the path of moderation. It is not granted to any man to define with precision what portion of time is requisite for the publick

lick and private worship of God. One of the well known errors of darker ages, not altogether renounced in the present day, was to relinquish the substantial purposes of life, and to resist, in many instances, the reasonable demands of nature for the sake of adhering to the offices of devotion. Whereas it is clear, from the present constitution of things, that labour of some kind or other is necessary to the whole human race, that the portions of time required for the immediate service of the Almighty are very small when compared with the whole ; that such service, when properly attended to, indicates and improves a good disposition, but does not constitute real goodness, is a preparation for a spiritual contest, a putting on of our spiritual armour. But alas ! with too many it is the resource of idleness or hypocrisy. How often do we see the eyes and the hands lifted up to Heaven, while the heart is fixed upon earthly objects ? * We have heard of days, in which men fasted and *prayed for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.* We know many who address the supreme Being with uncommon warmth and perseverance, who are divested of common honesty. What are

* *Isaiah 58.*

the prayers and Thanksgivings of such men, but the *sacrifices of fools*, of whom we may affirm, that the more they offer the more they offend ? Yet such men are often dissatisfied with the daily Service of the Church, and repair to unhallowed places of absurd worship to supply the seeming deficiency. Others, ill affected to religion, comparing this shew of sanctity with it's disgraceful and pernicious fruits, either conclude that the advantages of assembling together are more specious than real, or become impatient under the continuance of prayers and praises, which, calculated as they are to improve morality, have, through perverseness, tended to it's annihilation and have usurped it's place. After all, they who complain of the tediousness of the Liturgy, have reason to suspect their own lukewarmness, and they who pronounce it too concise may, by meditation in private, supply what they think is wanting : but let them ever distinguish real piety from puritanical moroseness, let them be at the greatest distance from supposing that to be the end which is only the means.

The power of absolving was evidently granted to the ministers of Christ. From it's abuses

abuses in the Church of Rome, it has been the subject of ridicule or invective. But whatever the form may be, it is declaratory of the mercy of God upon the express condition of sincere repentance. The Greek Church well explains the meaning of all our forms by the following words, “* The Lord pardon you “ by me his unworthy servant.” The King of Heaven deals with us after the manner of earthly kings. He commissions his ambassadors to assure us of his mercy and loving kindness. But he alone can give validity to their sentence, because he alone knows whether we have performed the conditions upon which it is pronounced.

We are censured for praying to be delivered from sudden death, because, say our adversaries, it can only be a real evil by our own perverseness. Were this objection of any force, it would lead us to omit all kinds of depravity, it would be conclusive against the practice of good men in all ages, and under all dispensations, who have requested assistance from Heaven to resist the allurements of vice. And to pray against the *effect* of imprudence and supineness were but virtually

* Sparrow's *Rationale*, p. 25.

praying against the cause. But the truth is, sudden death is here considered as a temporal or worldly calamity, and we pray that no folly, no temerity of our own, no malice of our fellow creatures, no accident, which might have been prevented or avoided, may remove us from the *land of the living* before our appointed time. He, who hath implanted in us the principle of self preservation, He, who hath given efficacy to so many modes of prolonging life, authorizes us to hope that He will not be offended if we should supplicate for *length of days*. It was held out as a blessing to the Jews, it is held out to Christians as an inferior motive to prudence and industry, as a check to intemperance and prodigality: It is often more desireable for the sake of those committed to our immediate care and protection, than for our own. Sudden death has brought with it calamities which could neither be prevented nor foreseen, has created litigations of which remote posterity may have felt the effects, has precluded the execution of many laudable purposes, and has destroyed the exertion of exalted talents. It may, therefore, be justly deprecated, even from a regard to the publick good, and the general interest of mankind. Presumption is effectually

effectually prevented by the assurance that the most adverse circumstances may be turned to our advantage, and that we ask for nothing but as far as *it may be expedient for us.*

Of Infant Baptism, which has created so much controversy, it may be proper to speak more particularly. The various and vague notions concerning Original Sin have been treated with ridicule by the adversaries of Christianity, and much more has been asserted by our own advocates than Scripture will warrant. It is a safe and wholesome doctrine to assert in general terms that man in his natural state is liable to the wrath of God, that he is weak and helpless, that without the preventing and co-operating Grace of God he can do nothing. *To be born in sin* is a forcible expression, signifying innate propensity to sin ; *to be born in the wrath of God*, is to be born with all those imperfections, and under all those melancholy circumstances, which are the unavoidable punishment of Adam's transgression. Of the fate of those who die unbaptized it is superfluous to enquire. But to place the helpless infant by prayer under the protection of the Almighty is a charitable and an edifying practice. Perhaps, from the general

neral command for baptism, no positive, no incontestable argument can be adduced in our favour. “ Whether baptism (says the * Author of the Irenicum) “ shall be administered “ to infants or no, is not set down in express “ words, but left to be gathered by analogy “ and consequences; what manner it shall be “ administered in, whether by dipping or “ sprinkling, is not absolutely determined; “ what form of words to be used, whether in “ the name of all three persons, or sometimes “ in the name of Christ only, as in the Acts “ we read (if that be the sense, and not ra- “ ther in Christ’s name, i. e. by Christ’s au- “ thority;) whether sprinkling or dipping “ shall be thrice, as some Churches use it, or “ only once, as others; these things, we “ see, as relating to an ordinance of divine “ institution, are yet passed over without “ any express command, determining either “ way, in Scripture.” An injunction for making disciples, strictly speaking, implies a capacity of being instructed. But we find that Infant Baptism prevailed in the Church from the beginning; and so much is clear from the Gospel itself, that our Saviour

* Stillingfleet’s Irenicum, p. 178.

thought children worthy his care and attention, that he rebuked his disciples for thinking otherwise; that, as he informs us in another passage, ** their angels do always behold the face of his Father, which is in heaven*, which expression must imply peculiar favour and protection. Nothing can be alledged against Baptism which is not equally forcible against circumcision. But were the custom ever so absurd, all its absurdity is removed by the Rite of Confirmation, wherein are ratified all the promises and engagements made at our baptism.

Other considerations will vindicate our practice. He who introduces his children into the congregation of the faithful, enters into an engagement that he will bring them up in the *nurture and admonition of the Lord*, that he will, to the utmost of his power, make them undefiled members of Christ's body. The whole office for baptism is replete with instruction to those who attend it; the words of reception are particularly strong and expressive; no minister can pronounce them, no attentive christian can hear them,

* Matt. xviii.

without

without emotion, without reanimated courage. A strong argument for Infant Baptism may be drawn from reason and from fact. Whenever the spiritual life begins, then ought to begin our supplications for grace, which, like the refreshing dew upon the tender plant, shall give life and vigour to those infant virtues which are discovered at a very early age. How soon do we find affection and gratitude, how soon, by accurate observation, do we discern those propensities, which constitute a striking and characteristick distinction thro' life? They who have been most minute in their directions for the proper management of children, have expressed well grounded apprehensions concerning their morals from the very moment of their birth, and have condemned, with just acrimony, the practice of those who remove them from their natural protectors, to vice, meanness, or folly. It were strange, therefore, if a Christian were less solicitous about the morals of his child than some Heathens have been; or if, while he is using every obvious, every prudential, method to preserve them untainted, he should not implore the blessing of providence upon all his endeavours. It would be strange to suppose that He, by whom we have been holden

holden up ever since we were born, should not at least be as attentive to our spiritual as our temporal welfare.

We have been often accused of presumptuously asserting, in the Funeral Service, that the deceased person is advanced to a state of happiness and glory. But the phrase of “taking unto himself” means no more than removing out of this world, and the body is committed to the ground under a general hope of a resurrection to eternal life. When they who die by their own act are committed under the same form, it should be considered, that a tribunal, from which we cannot appeal, has previously, however erroneously, declared it to be the act of God, the act of a disordered understanding. In this, and many other instances, it is safe to incline to the charitable side of the question. In doubtful cases, we have no right to enquire by what degree of imprudence the life of a deceased person was shortened, by what means it might have been prolonged: nor ought we to hope otherwise than that the greatest sinner may find acceptance with God. We know not with what earnestness he may have prayed for forgiveness, we know not with what sincerity he may have repented.

Concerning

Concerning *the accomplishment of the number of the Elect*, as nothing has been revealed, so perhaps we might have been silent. And yet there is no wish to confine the mercy of God to a smaller number than that which he hath destined to eternal life. The very expression implies a completion of what is already decreed. And surely, every Christian considering the cares, the temptations, the vanities, of this sinful world, may ardently wish *for new Heavens and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*. Surely he may pant after that happiness which is the end of his existence, the reward of his obedience.

To object against the perpetual use of occasional psalms and hymns, is to condemn the constant practice of the Jewish and the Christian Church, and is above all things frivolous and captious. That similar circumstances should create similiar emotions, and that whatever is not applicable to our condition may yet tend to our edification, is the general principle of incorporating scripture into our services. Inspiration adds weight and solemnity, commands reverence superior to all human compositions. Historical or prophetical allusions inform the understanding,

ing, while they make a lasting impression upon the heart.

In the Commination-Service, so formidable to certain weak minds, we usurp no power of judging our fellow creatures, we condemn sin in the abstract, we condemn ourselves for having committed it, that we may not finally *be judged of the Lord.*

Perhaps it is more to be wished than expected, that the days appointed for humiliation and fasting might be devoutly observed. Such observance would contribute to the health of body and soul. A liberal and unrestrained participation of the good things of this life brings on disease, creates indolence and languor. And yet a total abstinence, as well as moderate forbearance, is but a secondary purpose when compared with a suspension of amusements and pleasures, with a temporary discouragement of that dissipation which the institution of the Christian sabbath, on many occasions, instead of restraining, only tends to increase. The truth is, from former usurpations, the Governors of the Church have lost all their authority, and the aid of the civil power, whatever reproachful names may be

be given to it, is become necessary to enforce those salutary injunctions, which are more of a spiritual than a temporal kind. If power can be exercised with wisdom and with efficacy, we should be little solicitous in whose hand it is placed, and yet we may rejoice to see it placed where it will excite the least suspicion.

Time has brought some regulations and restrictions into disuse. Let not the Church be answerable for inconveniences which no prudence of man can ever prevent, and let her adversaries know, that we wish to silence their cavils by any thing sooner than by a penal statute. If some slight alterations in the Lessons, and in the Matrimonial Service, if a rubrick, explanatory of the real tendency of the Athanasian Creed, and a less frequent repetition of the Lord's Prayer, might prove satisfactory, and induce them to unite in one Communion, perhaps our superiors would not be inflexible to these moderate concessions. But what reason is there to think that these will be sufficient? Several experiments have formerly been made without success, in order to reconcile discordant parties; and to endanger the adherence of our friends by a fruitless

fruitless attempt to comprehend our enemies, would neither be prudent nor just.

The Liturgy comprehends the whole Christian system, it inculcates every doctrine and every precept of the Gospel; it destroys every vainglorious thought, and all reliance on our own unassisted endeavours. Every prayer offered up implies that we will, to the utmost of our power, promote those good purposes which we wish to see accomplished; and as Scripture does not enable us to judge what *degree* of assistance will be granted us, nor *how* the assistance is granted, the more humble and the more general our expressions are, the better will they agree with the condition of frail and dependent creatures. It is true, indeed, that extreme diffidence might, through human weakness, end in supine indolence. But, generally speaking, he who knows that all he can do is but little, will endeavour to compensate, by diligence and perseverance, what is wanting in ability.

May a due sense of our infirmities *add strength to our faith, and seriousness to our repentance*; and may that worship, which unites together high and low, rich and poor, under

the humiliating but just appellation of *vile earth and miserable sinners*, gradually purify our hearts from every sinful inclination, from every thought which exalteth itself against God, to whom, with the Son and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

R O M. XVI. 17.

NOW I BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, MARK
THEM WHICH CAUSE DIVISIONS AND
OFFENCES CONTRARY TO THE DOC-
TRINE WHICH YE HAVE LEARNED, AND
AVOID THEM.

To preserve us steadfast and unmoveable
in the principles of the Church of
England, it may not be improper to take a
general view of the mischiefs of Separation.
What allowances the Almighty will here-
after make for weakness of understanding,
or prejudice of education, is not granted us
to determine. The condemnation of error
implies no uncharitable judgment of indi-
viduals. But if the guide be blind, we must
guard against the obvious consequences of

placing ourselves under his direction ; if the pilot would carry us to rocks and quicksands, it is of little moment, as to our safety, whether ignorance or rashness would be the primary cause of our ruin.

Of the evils of separation, some are chargeable upon Dissenters in general, and some upon particular denominations.

Of the general evils, the first and most obvious is a breach of Christian unity. And to prevent this the Apostles seem to have exerted their utmost powers, both in preaching and writing ; they seem to have branded with the strongest marks of disapprobation the contentious and the turbulent. And, indeed, who does not clearly see that such a spirit is in direct enmity with the true spirit of religion ? Who does not see that the crime of heresy arises from that general murmuring and discontent with which it is attended, more than from the immediate object of disputation ? If Christianity owe much of its influence to the firm and collected exertions of numbers, if every religious duty be performed with more animation by society, if the generality of men have neither leisure nor ability to form

form a system for themselves, and if it be the highest presumption for individuals, even to attempt what no individual could ever execute with tolerable success, every Separatist should seriously consider, whether, upon his own principles, he is not giving up a great advantage to avoid a small inconvenience, especially if he reflect upon another general evil of separation, which is, the triumph it affords to the enemies of our holy Faith. Is this, they exclaim, the boasted light of revelation ! Is this the boasted perspicuity of Gospel precepts ! Is this the almost irresistible conviction which they are said to create ! Are not the Annals of the Church a recital of wars and fightings, of feuds and animosities, of rapine and extortion, of gross sensuality, or affected austerity, concealed under the veil, and vindicated under the sanction, of a peaceable and a pure religion ? If Popery have made many Deists abroad, Conventicles have not failed to make many at home. Let any thing, however respectable, however important in itself, once assume a ridiculous or contemptible appearance, and a superficial observer will be immediately disgusted ; he will expect nothing valuable where the dictates of reason and common sense are notoriously violated. When the bias is already on

the side of infidelity, the most trivial circumstance will tend to increase it. Ridicule, so far from being a test of truth, is frequently a great support of falsehood ; it is apt to engage and confine the attention to the surface of things, it sometimes dazzles the mental eye, sometimes misplaces or disfigures the object of contemplation. He, who can employ it with ingenuity and success, is constantly in search of matter, and seldom distinguishes between those smaller foibles which may afford it proper exercise, and those greater enormities which cannot be thought of without horror. The two great Satyrists of Rome have pointed out this necessary distinction, and the preference given to the earlier of them arises from an inattention to the subject matter of their censure.

But what shall be thought of those who excite ridicule, when they profess to create seriousness ? Do they not cause our common good to be evil spoken of ? Do they not destroy all that reverence in the worship of God which is indispensably required of frail dependent creatures ? Do not they frequently address him, or speak of the ways of his providence, in language that would be offensive to an earthly superior ? He who wishes to convince

convince an unbeliever must speak the words of soberness as well as of truth ; must be peculiarly attentive to the dignity of his subject, which has so often raised human thoughts and human language to a degree of sublimity never attained by the greatest writers of Greece and Rome. Besides the common enemies of religion, we cannot but know that the Romanists have argued against the propriety of our Reformation from the variety of sects into which Protestants are divided. The industrious Authors of the London Cafes have been very explicit on this head ; they have pointed out to Dissenters of every age and every denomination the very great detriment which the common cause sustains from vexatious and ill grounded opposition. *The three-fold cord is not broken*, but it has been often weakened, and many of those who, in common with ourselves, have been most zealous in destroying the pretensions of one infallible guide, have increased the absurdity they undertook to remove, by placing in the breast of each individual a monitor incapable of deception.

Revolutions of every kind will weaken some parts of an establishment. When the

minds of men are heated, even by just zeal, the ferment continues for some time after the evil is removed, and the abhorrence of one extreme often carries them into the contrary. The abuse of authority is brought as an argument against its use; and because men are neither compelled nor terrified into Communion with the Church, they disdain to be assisted and edified by her in their Christian course. Because her ministers were deprived of part of their revenue under the *pretext* of Reformation, they therefore conclude that the remaining part may be diverted into any channel, which a mean, mercenary, or innovating spirit shall dictate. Well may the Romanist deride or inveigh against the Monarch, who, from his opposition to Papal power, has been remembered with that gratitude which he never merited, when they find that Protestants can so absurdly confound robbery and reformation together, when they discover much policy, but no appearance of justice, when the publick is receiving as little real utility from the present Lay possessors of religious houses, as our ancestors did from those, who were displaced. Not to mention the great allowances which ought to be made for the difference of times, and how unjust it is

is to appropriate to any class of men that guilt which they participated in common with their fellow creatures.

Divine right either to power or to revenue is very justly exploded by the Ministers of Christ. Whatever they possess is established upon the same foundation with the possessions of others; they desire not to have a stronger, and they ought not to have a weaker. There cannot be a wiser or more advantageous measure than that the Legislature should from time to time strengthen their just influence, and act as their auxiliaries, inasmuch as the morals of the rising generation depend greatly upon their exertions, and they have few enemies who are not enemies to real religion. If our Jerusalem were at unity with herself, if *her inhabitants all spake the same thing, if there were no divisions among them and they were perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*, the general interest of Christianity would daily be improved; blasphemy, ridicule, and invective would have as little success, as they have of real poignancy. Unbelievers would not despise us, even if they shut their ears against conviction, and the Church of Rome herself would think more favourably

favourably of us in proportion as strife and debate were banished from amongst us, in proportion as we gained stability to our government and worship. How far time may effect a re-union is impossible to conjecture ; the most probable means will be to lay aside former animosity, and, agreeably to the idea of our first Reformers, to imitate whatsoever is useful in their institutions, unaffected by invidious appellations, some of which are the more offensive because they are borrowed, and perverted, from scripture.

Another general evil of Separation is instability. If some of the Sectaries have regular forms and confessions of faith, there is great reason to suspect that these forms and confessions are not perfectly attended to. Subscription to a certain number of our Articles, though not abrogated by law, is become obsolete in practice ; and many of those, who claim protection under a specifick name and a specifick description, are indulging themselves in every latitude of opinion, and acknowledge no obligation whatsoever. He, who should enlist under the banner of some of them, would not easily find a resting place ; so far from it, that the moment he engaged in

in their Communion, he would be told that renunciation of system is the leading principle of a Dissenter, that an unlimited power of judging is the birthright of every Christian, and that the slavery of the mind is equally unjust and intolerable. But can we seriously think that they, who hold such language, are, not endeavouring to make proselytes themselves? Do they speak or write with a less dogmatizing spirit than those who instruct under an establishment? Do they not know that there are many things which the generality of their audience have neither leisure nor ability to examine?

In many of the sects there are to be found either no regular articles of faith, or the forms are so vague, so uncertain, that they admit of no consistent interpretation. Some have separated from their brethren of the same denomination upon the slightest difference, and the slighter the difference, the greater has been the animosity, as if the most violent contention ought to arise about the smallest trifles. The ignorance and the variety of teachers have a natural tendency to create doubt and uncertainty in the mind. Every man of understanding and diffidence clearly

clearly sees how hard the task is to prevent misconstruction and error. But ignorance and presumption shut the eyes against every danger and every difficulty. And who shall expect edification, much less who can hope to be *established* in the faith, from teachers * *who understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm.* † *Behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the Heavens thereof,* the bewildered Christian knows not whence he came nor whither he is going. The danger of unsettled notions in religion is frequently pointed out by the sacred penmen. † *Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,* fully expresses what we see exemplified in affairs of much less moment than the work of salvation. Do not many of the evils of life arise from levity and want of resolution? Have not the noblest talents, have not the highest attainments, become useless from inconstancy? Has not life imperceptibly glided on with many, till the very resolution which they first possessed, has forsaken them, and they have become the sport of idleness and accident, wanting employment for the present hour, and as little solicitous concerning the next?

* 2 Tim. i. 7.

† Isaiah v. 30.

† Gen. xl ix. 5.

Indolence often brings on a depression of spirits, and he who is once depressed is ready to be dissatisfied with every thing, seeks food for discontent, and may justly be said to prey upon his own vitals. In such a state how many converts have been made by enthusiasts ! The mind, wearied out by long wandering, seeks for quietness and repose, wherever the prospect opens, like the fainting traveller, who quenches his thirst at the first stream he can find, without any attention to the salubrity of the water.

That the religious opinions of many are fortuitous is not to be wondered at: but what is fortuitous seldom makes a lasting impression: * *they are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* † *My people, saith the Lord by his Prophet Jeremiah, have committed two evils, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have bewept them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.* Men are guilty of twofold imprudence; they reject the source of real comfort, and then attempt to seek it where it never will be found. It is not pretended that

* 2 Tim. iii. 7.

† Jer. ii. 13.

authority alone will fix the merits of any establishment, but to those who are yet in the labyrinth of error, who like the waves of the sea are driven about and tossed, we may assert with truth, and in the words of an able defender of our Church ——* “ That were “ her present constitutions to be tried by “ apostolical and primitive practice, her faith “ to be judged by that of the first centuries, “ and four most truly general Councils, or “ her Liturgy and discipline, her rites, ce-“ remonies, and way of publick worship, to “ be compared with what we can collect and “ judge of these purest times ; or were she to “ stand or fall by the judgment of the most “ able and learned of the Protestant divines “ abroad since the Reformation, she would “ not only be justified but commended, not “ only pass for a true and sound part of “ Christ’s Church, but the most sound and “ orthodox, the most truly primitive and “ apostolical, of any at this day on the face “ of the earth.” The approbation or the con- currence of the wise and the good of so many differentages and periods, if insufficient to gain proselytes, may at least be some re-

* London Cafes, Vol. I.

medy against levity in ourselves, may add warmth to our zeal, and earnestness to our endeavours, may repress in us every desire of change.

Another general evil of Separation is a contention concerning what are called matters of indifference, which, having neither moral good nor evil in them, required no warrant from Scripture beyond an injunction for the preservation of decency and order, and which only become important by being subservient to important purposes. Controversy, even upon the most essential points, is seldom followed by conviction: and if positive doctrines and commands admit of so much disputation, what shall be said of those rites and ceremonies, for the establishment of which the Church has only an implied authority? St. Paul appeals to men's natural notions of decorum, and silences the contentious with this concise declaration, *¶ We have no such custom, neither the Churches of God.* It is always safe to rest whatsoever is not sinful upon long and established usage. Objects of contention are sufficiently numerous: the general suffrages

¶ 1 Cor. ii.

of mankind gradually lessen them, and often shame the most litigious into peaceful acquiescence.

Men little consider that so much attention paid to things of inferior moment, by disputing their use and propriety, creates an indifference to the † weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. In the common transactions of life, we deem it an argument of a contracted and a mean understanding to dwell upon minute circumstances, or to consume much time and labour in adjusting even slight inaccuracies. The eye which is very microscopick is seldom very comprehensive. The Christian who is rich in good works may be compared to the rich § Householder. Minuteness concerning trifles would in each of them be meanness.

Of the evils chargeable upon particular denominations, none is more fatal than the evil of what we call Enthusiasm, that fever of the human mind, which destroys its sober and rational exertions, and gradually weakens its powers by suspending their regular exercise. It disparages the use of rea-

† Matth. xxiii. 23.

§ See Long. S. 33.

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son, because it makes conversion to depend upon no regular conviction, upon no diligent examination of Scripture. It overthrows all those beautiful arguments drawn from analogy; it establishes some visionary notion concerning Christian Perfection, which either altogether, or in part, contradicts the well-grounded doctrine of a progressive state, illustrated in the natural as well as in the intellectual world, illustrated by every thing without and within us. The inward call, so sudden, so unexpected, and so essential to salvation, is described by no distinguishing marks, and yet, we are informed, is very easily understood. It is not altogether irresistible, for the Journals of one of it's greatest Advocates acquaint us with many Apostates.

If Enthusiasm disparage reason, we cannot wonder that it should also disparage Learning. St. Paul's observations in his first Epistle to the Corinthians concerning the Grecian Philosophy have been traduced for the purpose. Every attainment may puff men up with conceit. The human heart is treacherous, and many things which have the appearance of humility are the effect of pride. It has often been proved, by irresistible arguments, that

Learning in all it's branches is subservient to the interest of Religion, and the very exercise of the understanding upon other useful topics, prepares it to think with greater accuracy and propriety upon the interesting subject of Religion. All our elementary studies may be compared to the prudent and preparatory discipline of those who excelled in the Olympick Games: they predispose as well as qualify; they give alacrity as well as ability. Whoever is conscious that he is indebted principally to human learning for the power of illustrating Scripture, of reading the original tongues, of arranging his matter, of reasoning upon particular points, of explaining ancient customs, and even for the very language in which his ideas are clothed, as long as that language is perspicuous and liberal, is to the highest degree unpardonable, if he should either directly or remotely invite to the ministerial office persons totally devoid of such qualifications. The plea of necessity, if it could ever have been urged with any plausibility, is at this distance of time become frivolous: but indeed, when credulity and vulgarity have taken possession of the founders and the leaders, we cannot expect that, in this sense, *the disciple should be above his master.* The talent

talent which was never possessed is not more useless than that which is concealed, during such concealment.

But extraordinary inspiration is supposed to answer every objection, and to supply every defect. Common rules of criticism are to be exploded as the inventions of men, as hostile to the operations of the Holy Spirit, both in the preachers and the hearers of the Word. And some well affected to the Church have apprehended that one kind of language is calculated for the improvement of the understanding and another for the improvement of the heart. This error has given importance to high sounding words, and empty declamation. A true critick will analyse the human mind, and will with the *Author of the Dialogue between Eudoaus and Philanthus, discover that nothing will or ought to give lasting pleasure, which has not truth for it's foundation. It is one thing to dazzle and another to enlighten; it is one thing to alarm, and another to convince. Fictitious scenes of joy and sorrow make an impression upon the mind from a temporary persuasion that they are real, from a similarity to real occurren-

* Bouhours.

ces. Permanent effects can only be produced by good and substantial causes ; and it is a contradiction in terms, that reasonable creatures should execute the great purpose for which they were created without the constant aid of that faculty, which is their characteristick distinction, the origin and source of their dignity and honour.

If what has been said should appear as nothing, because it opposes inward conviction, let us appeal to those writings which all parties acknowledge to be inspired. Have they transgressed the rules, are they unable to bear the scrutiny, of judicious criticism ? Have not Unbelievers acknowledged and admired their energy and sublimity ? The praise of men was no primary consideration with the first preachers of the Gospel. Subtlety of argument and *oppositions of science, falsely so called,* were industriously avoided. Surely every Ambassador of Christ may, after their example, condescend to the weak and the ignorant without derogating from the dignity of his embassy ; he may be zealous without rhapsody, and familiar without vulgarity.

The misfortune is, that enthusiastick
teachers

teachers persuade the world that they are chosen vessels, that they act under particular communications of grace and favour: the very winds and the rain will cease, the common powers of nature will be enlarged, that admiring multitudes may hear from them, what they are supposed not to have heard before, the glad tidings of salvation. The humble Christian confides in the general care of the Almighty, and is taught by his religion to turn the most adverse events to advantage. But he does not presume that the course of things is perpetually changed for his sake, even when engaged in the most laudable purposes. If the ordinary means of preserving health and strength have been successful, he pours forth his soul in strains of general thanksgiving to his Creator; but where there is so frequently *one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, he dares not alledge such an event as an instance of particular kindness, as a seal of peculiar favour. Much less would he impute to the influence of the Holy Spirit, what some would suspect to arise from malignity of heart, or from a defect of understanding, from transient heat, or disordered spirits.

The Church of England might entertain

a more favourable opinion of them, if they did not appropriate to themselves the appellation of true members, or pretend to be faithful auxiliaries. That in a few places, and amongst a few individuals, they have introduced a sense of religion, where none prevailed before, is not to be denied: But if the ordinary means of instruction be neglected, who shall be answerable for the consequences? Surely not the Ministers, but the despisers, of the Word.

In general, their instructions are not subsidiary, but contradictory to ours, and always carry with them an implied, too often an open and direct, charge of deficiency in ours. To undermine the foundation of that esteem, which is necessary for the success of our labours, to accuse our very diligence in preparing spiritual instruction for our flock, as if our endeavours were profane in proportion as they are constant, is productive of evils, which the most popular and the most prevailing oratory will not compensate. God forbid that we, any more than they, *should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.* But the same

same gracious Lord forbid that, in magnifying the merits of redeeming love, we should derogate from the wisdom and goodness of Creation, or imagine that his Son came down from heaven to destroy in us any thing but the body of sin, and the works of the devil. The change intended to be wrought in us is great, and known in Scripture by the figurative and expressive title of *a new Creation*.

Another evil, chargeable upon a particular denomination of Christians, is a preposterous use of the language of Scripture in the common business of life. Little did our Translators imagine that such a perversion could ever take place, when they studiously avoided vulgar expressions, and even technical terms. By such precaution they well knew an habitual reverence for Sacred Writ would be encouraged and promoted, and the distinction of sacred from profane would be carefully preserved. With equal propriety might men apply the vessels of the Sanctuary and the Sanctuary itself for the common purposes of life, as bring forward the diction of sublime doctrines and precepts, of interesting narrative, and pious sentiments, into worldly business, and ordinary salutation.

With this evil is connected another, namely, an entire renunciation of terms importing respect and courteousness. The slightest observer might have discovered that the Prophets and Apostles were equally careful in expressing, according to the usage of the times, an outward veneration and obeisance. To stifle resentment, to restrain impetuosity, and to conciliate affection, are the grand purposes for which the wisest men have acceded to established modes, and submitted to ceremonious restrictions. Thus we become *all of us* subject one to another, and inferiority of station is not excluded from proper deference and regard.

To brand with reproach those professions which are necessary for the defence of the nation in general, and of the life, liberty and property of individuals is not less an evil in itself, because, from the paucity of the communion whence it originates, no actual mischief is felt. They shew sufficient inclination to enjoy the benefits of extensive commerce and permanent possession, and yet very ungratefully disparage the means by which those benefits are to be acquired and preserved, little considering that to partake of the fruits of iniquity,

iniquity, would be to partake of iniquity itself; and not at all reflecting that to preclude redress of flagrant and notorious grievances, is to encourage insolence, oppression, and injustice; that we are almost as much indebted to the interpreters, as we are to the first framers, of our laws; and that ingenious arguments, followed by judicious decisions, give stability and certainty to many points, which the irre-mediable imperfection of the laws themselves has left undecided.

That contention of every kind is carried on with unbecoming rancour, and frequently upon frivolous pretences, cannot be denied. Remedies are allowed for injuries apparently trifling, but those acts which, taken singly, are of no consideration, may become formidable by repetition. One wilful encroachment is perhaps a prelude to many more. The laws speak not the language of revenge but security; the sword itself is drawn for the sake of the olive branch.

The foregoing slight review of the evils arising from Separation may tend to confirm our own faith, and increase our gratitude to that Church, which keeps us at an equal distance

tance from levity and gloominess, from despair and presumption, from uncharitable censure, and affected candour. With popular prejudices and trite accusations, with those reflections which one communion of Christians wantonly deliver against another, we have no concern.

Nothing can properly create reprehension, but that which is openly professed and avowed; nothing ought to be alledged from imperfect surmise, or remote deduction. Absurd consequences may ensue, which men do not foresee. Long continuance in any persuasion reconciles the mind, and establishes habitual approbation.

Whatever is good and laudable in any denomination let us studiously follow, always remembering that, though not united together in the visible Church of Christ, we have fellowship in the invisible, that we are all heirs of the same promises, partakers of the same grace. May we gradually prepare ourselves, even during our outward disunion, for the happy union which we all sincerely wish for *among the spirits of just men made perfect.*

S E R M O N VIII.

1 JOHN iii. Part of Verse 2.

IT DOETH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE
SHALL BE.

IF what has been already delivered may tend to lessen mens prejudices against the Church of England, if it may shorten controversy, and enforce mutual forbearance, the most sanguine expectations will be fulfilled. There are, however, abuses under the best establishment, for which the first framers of that establishment are not answerable. These abuses increase the number of Separatists, who, not making the proper distinction between our principles and our practice, ascribe the perversions of the latter to the imperfections of the former. In taking a review of the

the present state of Religion, we ought, with a becoming freedom, and yet without prejudice or malignity, to point out the reigning vices and errors of the age in which we live. After which will be subjoined some conjectural Remarks upon Prophecies which yet remain to be fulfilled.

And first, let us point out the reigning Vices and Errors of the present Age.

To compare it with past times is neither just, necessary, nor practicable. It is not just, because, if the wisdom and experience of those who have gone before us have not added both to our knowledge and our goodness, we are much worse than they. It is not necessary, because, if we should appear to advantage, the misconduct of others will be no excuse for ours. It is not practicable, because the memorials of former times only furnish us with a few characters, conspicuous for their virtues or their vices, while the generality were either unknown, or are forgotten. Historians indeed, of lively imaginations, exhibit what they deem a faithful picture of the most barbarous and uncivilized people; they please the superficial, and they deceive the unwary,

unwary, observer. A cool and considerate enquirer soon discovers that the representation is ideal.

That bigotry is every day decreasing amongst us, must be acknowledged with singular satisfaction. But let us seriously ask ourselves, whether this boasted liberality of sentiment be not owing in many to indifference or lukewarmness. Does there not reign amongst us a general inattention to the offices of religion? Does not every frivolous excuse keep us from divine worship? If we ought not to consider ourselves as sent to reform mankind, would it not at least become us to discountenance those who endeavour to overturn religion and morality? If freedom of thinking upon speculative subjects be allowed, if falsehood itself be beneficial towards the discovery of truth, yet surely those laws are imperfect, that government is remiss, which have provided no punishment for the avowed and shameless Advocate of adultery. The dispensers of justice have been sufficiently zealous in discouraging publications which inflame the minds of the people. Why are they unable to discourage those which may corrupt the morals? Our dramatick performances

ances are gradually purifying themselves. Why should the evil exist at all? Why should not root and branch be taken away? The truth is, many glory in their shame, and many care for none of these things. What wonder is it then, if some serious Christians, disgusted by such indifference, should join with men of more zeal, and greater seriousness, who attend more frequently the House of God, and are less addicted to dissipation and pleasure?

We think it an argument of vexatious opposition to refuse an annual tribute of honour to the Apostles, and an annual remembrance of the great and interesting events of the Gospel. But does not our practice offer indignity to the sabbath itself? To avoid puritanical severity, do we not seek pleasure, do we not imitate the practice of the Continent, and render that ordinance the means of corruption, which was intended to be the means of animating our piety and strengthening our virtue? The salutary laws enacted for the better observation of the Lord's day, are little attended to, and but seldom executed; and they whose time is most in their own power are the most notorious delinquents. Without any

any reverence for the service of the Church, without any compassion for beast or man, they hasten forward to business or recreation, which might be postponed or omitted, or they are wearied out with the tediousness of the day, which yet is accompanied with no painful, no rigorous seclusion from rational society.

We censure affected singularity in language, in apparel, and in the common intercourse of life. But have we not in conforming to the fashions of this world conformed also to it's follies? Have we not lost that simplicity of life and manners which made many of our ancestors truly respectable, and many of their descendants great and opulent? Are not words themselves become empty sounds, and often worse than insignificant? Amidst all our complaints of those burdens which an unfortunate war hath brought upon us, is our luxury abated, is our abstinence greater? Are not they held in much higher estimation who contribute to the amusement, than they who promote the good, of their fellow-creatures? Is not our attention directed more to the ornamental than to the useful parts of education? Is not academical life itself infected with

with that luxury which has been taught in the days of infancy, and which no sumptuary laws, no liberal discipline can prevent? The same complaint existed in Rome, and by degrees the Empire was destroyed. Have not our very studies a tincture of idleness? For, though the value of no performance ought to be estimated from its largeness, yet true wisdom must often be sought for, as hid treasure, and will not be found upon the surface. To render religion and learning amiable in the sight of all men is an indispensable duty, but he who cleanses the outside of the cup and platter only, procures momentary praise, and incurs lasting reprehension.

The decay of christian piety is imputed by popular declaimers to the negligence of the Clergy. As a general charge this is notoriously false. The instructions they administer have been admired by Christians of all denominations and all countries. Many of their productions have been translated into different languages, as replete with edification, and models of composition. The generality of them disdain to seek for popularity, by relinquishing the path which reason and good sense have pointed out. That they cannot administer reproof

reproof with success is owing to the corruption of the age. And, indeed, why does every man carry a monitor in his own breast, if that monitor, aided by general instructions, be insufficient to guide him in the path of innocence? Can we suppose that the notorious sinner is free from many warnings, that he has not many painful apprehensions of the judgments of God? Nor is it so much the fear of man's displeasure that stops the mouth of the conscientious minister, as his despair of success.

To deny or to conceal the imperfections of the Clergy would be useless and absurd. But let them not be viewed with a more censorious or a more jealous eye than the rest of their fellow christians. Their profession and their knowledge strengthen the common obligation to a life of purity and holiness, but do not exempt them from the infirmities of man. Some of them, who have arrived to affluence and splendour, are enjoying the rewards of former diligence, and acknowledged ingenuity. And with the evils arising from neglected worth they are not chargeable. The ordinary duties of their profession may be performed by men of moderate attainments. But if any

one, neglecting literature, should confine his attention to the common parochial functions, or, on the contrary, should in the scholar forget the amiable character of the good shepherd, he would neither find nor deserve an advocate. A proper regard to essentials, joined with a little knowledge of the world, seems to characterize the clergy of the present age, and they that are otherwise will not be hid : their brethren will not attempt their vindication.

The wholesome practice of catechetical instruction has been adopted and pursued with advantage, which yet would be greater, if masters of families acted as faithful auxilliaries. This would lessen the number of conventicles more than a thousand arguments, this would convince sectaries that we are as zealous as themselves.

We abound with books of devotion, and spiritual instruction, suited to all capacities. But the distribution of them produces little effect. They must be answerable for the complaint who have occasioned it. Let such impediments be no discouragement. Prudence and perseverance may overcome the greatest difficulties. He who caused water to issue from

from the hard rock, can bring about the noblest events from the most improbable causes.

The attempts to overturn our Establishment have met with no success equal to the sanguine expectations of our adversaries. The number of the discontented bears no proportion to the whole ecclesiastick body; many of whom search the Scriptures, peruse the Fathers, and consult every source of information with unremitting zeal and industry. The spirit of enquiry ought not to be restrained by human laws, and to that spirit alone we wish to be indebted for the permanence of our Church.

Speculative opinions make but few proselytes among the people. They are generally averse to those discourses which call in question the divinity of Jesus Christ. They cannot enter into abstruse reasoning, or understand a long train of refined argumentation. We therefore speak in general terms concerning the mysteries of religion, and we endeavour to convince them of the necessity of learning. We leave to Enthusiasm the absurdity of giving them the Scriptures, and

desiring them to form a system for themselves. It is to supply them with armour, which, without the assistance of superior abilities, they cannot use to advantage.

Among the ignorant of all denominations bigotry reigns in its utmost malignity. Mutual accusations create mutual animosity, and we can little wonder that names of religious communions should have popular prejudices annexed to them, when places of nativity have so often created reproach. The Church of England instructs her members to revere the virtue of every age, every country, and every denomination. No error in principle or practice can be a subject of censure, but that which is publicly avowed and defended. Let the disgraceful event, which, through the madness of a bigotted Miscreant, threatened destruction to the metropolis, be a solemn admonition to the intelligent of every communion never to make their appeal to an ignorant multitude.

The prospect of a general union is probably visionary. The evils of separation will however be lessened in proportion as the teachers of every sect are better informed. If,

as some Euthusiasts would attempt to persuade us, knowledge of other kinds be of little service in explaining the Scriptures, it surely cannot be an impediment; it would create a dignity of character, it would promote a friendly intercourse, it would preclude illiberal reflections, it would correct asperity and moroseness.

Let us only contemplate the effects of Learning and Philosophy through the various kingdoms of Europe. They have united in friendship men of almost all persuasions; they have, as far as their influence extended, for it could not extend to the bulk of mankind, counteracted the dire effects of religious controversy, hereditary hatred, and national prejudice, and have increased not only the power but the desire of doing good. With what heartfelt pleasure does every christian remember the Mandate, which, amidst war, announced peace to the ingenious but unfortunate Navigator, so universally revered and lamented! With what satisfaction does he recollect the humanity of a General, who could mitigate the horrors of a siege, and, amidst the din of arms, could listen to the calls of compassion! Will not this conduct of our

natural enemies put to shame and silence some of our pretended friends? Will it not extinguish in ourselves all rancour and animosity? Otherwise, whatever we may profess, the Scriptures will inform us *that we know not what spirit we are of.*

Absolute Predestination is now no longer insisted on, because not warranted by Scripture. Our Saviour silenced the Mother of Zebedee's children, and the improper enquiries of his followers concerning the number of those who should be saved. Every one must watch over his own conduct, *must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.* *To be ordained to eternal life,* implies no more than a disposition to receive and perform the conditions of the Gospel. *To make our calling and election sure* is to evince the sincerity of our professions by our practice; to acquire a real and substantial interest in the inestimable privileges of Christianity. And all the Apostle's reasoning in his epistle to the Romans extends no farther than the admission of some into the Church of Christ, and the rejection of others. In this sense, * *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.* Even the glorification,

* Rom. ix. 16.

mentioned

mentioned in Rom. 8. is most probably to be understood of pre-eminence in this world as *Witnesses, Saints and Martyrs, as burning and shining lights.*

With the present state of Religion is naturally connected the accomplishment of such prophecies as affect this and future ages. Let it be no disparagement of the learned labours of those who have undertaken to explain such prophecies, if we should acknowledge that many difficulties attend so arduous an undertaking.

The Romanists are displeased with the leading principle upon which Protestants explain the Book of Revelations, and the other passages which refer to latter days. They little consider that the application is not personal, and that it belongs to corruptions, some of which they themselves have formally renounced. * One of their very able champions assures us, “ That to the Pontiff of “ Rome belongs no absolute or despotic ju- “ risdiction : That he is as much bound by “ the laws of the constitution as is the low-

* Mr. Berrington's Reflexions addressed to Mr. Hawkins, p. 69.

“ est member of it. That he has his preroga-
“ tive, but that they have their privileges, and
“ are independent on him, excepting where
“ it has pleased the Community, for the sake
“ of unity and good order, to surrender into
“ his hands a limited superintendence. That
“ it is his duty, particularly when immediate
“ pastors neglect theirs, to take care that the
“ Christian republick receive no injury; that
“ laws, which have been received, be
“ duly executed, and that the infraction of
“ them, by a co-ordinate punishment, be
“ chastised. That with princes or their states
“ he has no concern, that those days are gone
“ by, and tha^t the time is come when the in-
“ fluence of Rome is returning to it’s proper
“ channel. That when it shall be seen that
“ his kingdom is not of this world, that his
“ jurisdiction is benevolent and paternal, that
“ he is but the first Shepherd, and therefore
“ that he is prudent, moderate, patient meek
“ and humble, that he is such a head as a
“ Christian society requires, then will the
“ Bishop of Rome be respected, and on that
“ respect will be founded an authority ample
“ enough to fill the chair of St. Peter.”—
The Legislative body of this kingdom have
declared, by their indulgence, that they no
longer

longer fear Papal power, and Papal influence. Perhaps the remaining shackles and restrictions will be taken away, and connivance, in the mean season, will have the salutary effect of abrogation. The absurdity of worshipping in an unknown tongue is greatly lessened by a vernacular translation. The inherent merit of good works, and the power of unconditional absolution, are formally renounced. These are favourable symptoms, but the most favourable of all is the spirit of toleration, which is daily increasing in Popish countries, and would have it's perfect influence, if it were not for fear of the people, who are known to entertain an implacable hatred of Protestants, and are taught by some to believe them in a state of perdition. The same leaven is found amongst our own populace, but we do not increase it by descriptions of imaginary danger. If the antichristian spirit have departed from Rome, her Pontiff cannot be affected by that appellation, which the claims of exorbitant power once deserved, and her disciples will experience all the lenity of which they give the example.

Attempts to make proselytes from the established Religion of any country are seldom attended

attended with success, and often create more mischief than could be compensated by the greatest. Conversion is more frequently the effect of inconstancy than conviction; and it happens in religion, as in politicks, that a revolter often irritates those whom he deserts, and is despised by those, with whom he is united. The motives of conduct are thoroughly known to the Searcher of Hearts only, but the most superficial observer can discover, and the most candid will acknowledge, that interest or indifference has added to every denomination of Christians. The national religion must be supported and encouraged; this is common prudence and self defence; but he who invites individuals by peculiar liberality and protection to his own persuasion, encourages hypocrisy under the idea of advancing true religion. If we could ever hope for those happy days in which a whole phalanx, convinced of the purity of our faith and doctrine, shall join with us against the common enemy, we might then justly triumph, because we might deem the event to proceed from rational conviction. In the mean time, those plans of comprehension, which have been proposed with so much self-sufficiency,

sufficiency, would, under the pretence of accommodation, end in general confusion.

It seems agreed upon by those, who have studied the language of Prophecy, that before the end of the world there will be a conversion of all mankind to the Christian Faith. The Jews, who during so many centuries, have been driven into all kingdoms, and yet remain separate from each, have experienced a singular and uncommon fate. They are a living evidence of the Religion they oppose, and yet they wait for him, who is already come. It is a prevailing opinion among some Christians, that, when they are converted, they will be replaced in their own land. Whereas nothing seems more clear than that all those Prophecies, which foretel their return to Mount Sion and to Jerusalem, may, by an obvious figure, signify their admission into the Christian Church. Whether their conversion will be gradual or instantaneous, by what means it will be effected, is not necessary to be enquired into.

If we were to judge from the present appearance of things, we should find little reason to suspect that all mankind would ever

em-

embrace the Christian Religion. *And yet with God nothing is impossible.* Christians have not conducted themselves in distant territories with that meekness and moderation which their Religion recommends. To difficulties and obstacles apparently insurmountable they have added cruelty and rapacity, they have made impressions which time will not soon wear away. Let it not however be any discouragement either to missionaries themselves, or to those who have sent them, that their progress is but slow. They are but in the dawning, they are almost in the darkness, of that day, which, we trust, will enlighten the whole intellectual system. But let not the sublimity of prophetick language deceive us. We cannot tell whether this conversion of the whole world imply a conversion of every individual, of every sequestered barbarian. We know in what sense the Gospel was said to be preached to every creature, and * the Deluge itself is thought not to have been universal. Nor does a general conversion imply a similarity of sentiment in the converted. Many of the extravagancies of every denomination are given up, and how many more will hereafter be given up, is impossible to conjecture. Every concession brings us nearer.

* See the Hon. Daines Barrington's *Miscellanies.*

to unanimity, though the infirmities of our nature will probably keep us at a considerable distance from it. But in proportion as men are less tenacious of outward modes, and less addicted to vain speculations, they will become more attentive to the essentials of religion, they will encourage and promote universal benevolence.

But should their belief be the same, we have no room to hope that their practice will correspond with the purity of their faith. Amidst the astonishing discordance of sentiment which prevails, men are unanimous in maintaining that Vice is odious and detestable, that temptations are to be avoided or resisted. In whatever situation Christians of future ages may be placed, whatever sources of contention may be stopped, whatever strength and stability united endeavours may give to their cause, the rewards and punishments of another life cannot be painted in more lively colours to them than they are to us. Present pleasure will be equally alluring, the fashion of the world will change, but most probably will retain a considerable portion of folly. Indeed, if our Lord's prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem have any farther significance respecting the end of

the

the World, we are fully authorized to believe, that whenever the awful period shall arrive, men will be found as inattentive and improvident, as much immersed in the cares or in the amusements of life, as they were at the Flood. Let us not infer from hence that moral evil is as unavoidable by man as natural. Every change and every diminution of it proves the contrary. He is often so perverse that he can be wicked even without temptation, he can often serve Satan without even the shadow of reward. Will the Almighty then ever act irresistibly upon his mind? Will the calls of mercy be louder? Will the offers of grace be more abundant? What then can be done to others which hath not been done unto us?

It is uncertain whether the horrors of war will cease or be alleviated; for we have not found that the fatal experience of more than five thousand years has been sufficient to sheath the sword, or to lessen the influence of avarice and ambition. As little cause have we to hope that strife and confusion will cease amongst individuals. Competition in worldly interest will ever create envy and jealousy.

Many

Many of the calamities and many of the evils of life arise from weakness and ignorance. How shall such weakness and ignorance be removed? The bulk of mankind must ever be destined for employments which preclude intellectual improvement, and refinement of manners, which render them strangers to delicacy and sensibility not always to be found even in the Philosopher or the Scholar.

Every condition of life will have it's temptations; the rich and the powerful will be tempted to forget his Creator, the poor will be tempted to charge him foolishly. It may afford us some consolation, that the number of notorious offenders, though great, is not equal to that of past ages. Perhaps the difference is owing to severer punishment, and more easy detection: lenity, and deficiency of legal proof operate only as encouragements.

Commerce itself, and commerce can only end with the world, has some maxims not altogether reconcileable with true honour and integrity. It has a tendency to contract the mind, to degrade intellectual endowments, and to make the whole dignity of a nation
to

to consist in opulence. While it encourages industry, and adds to the accommodation of life, let it have it's proper share of our attention, but the moment it disparages those institutions which are formed to improve the understanding and the heart, let it be deemed hostile to religion. As long as the world itself endureth, the God of this World will be the object of adoration.

What additional restraint can reason and religion ever find out for that impetuous time of life in which man is justly compared to *a wild ass's colt*? What new remedy will be found for timid caution, querulous peevishness, and unaccountable avarice, too frequently attendant upon age? How is it that human nature at this day resembles so exactly the pictures which have been drawn many hundred years ago? What enchantment, what miracle, what alteration of circumstances, shall effect this imaginary change? Is the world to end, as Poets have told us it first began, with a golden age?

Whatever is meant by Satan's being bound a thousand years, we are told **that after the*

* Rev. xx. 7, 8.

thousand

thousand years he shall be loosed from his prison. And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

If all this be antecedent to the new [‡] *Heavens and the new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*, what ground have we to think that any part of the human race will live in a state of purity and perfection, while confined in these tabernacles of clay? We lessen the evidence of prophecy, when the events are improbable which we suppose to be foretold. In Religion much is left to the agency and the prudence of man. Success has been erroneously urged by several parties as an argument of the favour of Providence.

The promise of our blessed Lord is a general one, and ought not to be appropriated to any communion: * *He is ever present with the humble and contrite spirit.*

To the learned as well as the unlearned many of the decrees of Providence are as a

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 13.

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

sealed book. Those prophecies which regard the essential parts of Christianity admit of little dispute, are clear and explicit ; those which regard it's future history will only be understood in their completion. In the mean season, let our curiosity be restrained within it's proper limits, let the opposition of our adversaries increase our vigilance, let the profaneness of others increase our piety, so shall the works of darkness render us more and more the children of light, and the works of Satan may shake, if they cannot utterly destroy, his own kingdom ; so shall *‡ we enter that city, which hath no need of the Sun, neither of the Moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

‡ Rev. xx. 7, 8.

T H E E N D.

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